

THE UNFOLDING VISION

**An evaluative report
on the LWF/DMD**

Desk for Women in
Church and Society

1988 – 1997

LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Department for
Mission and Development



Contents

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Department for Mission and Development
Women in Church and Society
Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland

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Foreword

This evaluation report documents the work of the Desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) for one decade. As Secretary for WICAS from 1988 to 1998 I was part of this work, in the context of the Lutheran World Federation as a whole and specifically in the Department for Mission and Development (DMD). The evaluation was my last assignment, and this report is left for the LWF to see where we have come from as we move into the future.

Evaluation reports have to concentrate on learning and action. This one is no exception. Its immediate purpose is to help assess the work of WICAS for the ten-year period 1988 to 1997. The report's findings and recommendations can form the basis for planning the work of WICAS for the next millennium. WICAS had intended to undertake this exercise in 1998, but the schedule was brought forward to the end of 1997 so that I could contribute my intended plans for WICAS for 1998 before I left in January of that year. Three external consultants, Brigitte Lee, Jack Messenger and Valsa Verghese-Chacko, were appointed by WICAS/DMD to carry out the assessment.

My work within the Federation and with the team that prepared this report has been a wonderful experience of collegiality. I present this completed document to the LWF just as I conclude my work at WICAS, with thanks to all those who made the last ten years so exciting and worthwhile. I am particularly indebted to my colleague and friend Ana Villanueva, who has been a true partner in this work and will continue to influence it in the years to come. My thanks also go to the three members of the evaluation team, who gathered our stories from different sources and condensed them for easier reflection.

Just how valuable has this whole exercise been? In one sense, only time will tell, and it may be a long time. In another sense, the analysis of WICAS presented in this document has revealed and confirmed facts and impressions which can be of immediate benefit for all those concerned about the future of the LWF, about women and about gender issues.

The complexity of WICAS – what and who it is – is both a source of friction and a promise of hope. Friction can be caused by the different expectations of the various constituencies of the Desk. On the other hand, 'To whom does WICAS belong?' should in theory be a very difficult question to answer, but it is

2 Foreword

a tribute to the Desk that we can say it is by and for the churches, and by and for women. Women asked the churches for this Desk; women are part of the church; therefore WICAS is for the churches.

This is a promise of hope, because justice for women and gender equality comprise – among all the other pressing issues – the most important challenges facing church and society today. The revolutionary implications and powerful potential they have still to release from everyone could transform so many things for the better: individual human relationships, politics, economics, justice, human rights, the natural environment, our religious understandings – all will be affected.

WICAS has positioned itself in the vanguard of this revolutionary change and is excellently placed to adjust to the needs of the future. Within the mandate of the Federation and in the collegiality of Federation staff and women and men from member churches, this is a Desk that can bring about profound changes in the lives of people and of the church.

Perhaps the chief value of the exercise embodied by this report is that it provides pointers for future practice within the framework of the LWF. It points to possible strategies and ways of working which will best serve its aims and those of the churches. For individual women, it points to a Desk that helps to empower women by providing them with the support they need to act for themselves. For LWF member churches, it points to a Desk that can help liberate congregations and decision-making structures from attitudes and behaviours which imprison half of humanity. For society, it points to a way of working in partnership which can maximize available resources.

Many of the report's findings and recommendations refer to needs and expectations relating to feedback and communication, whether it be the provision of telecommunications hardware or the drafting of a statement of values and vision. For WICAS to work effectively, for it to know what is happening and what to do about it, it must have information: not just facts and figures, but information in the fullest, human sense of debate and discussion, conversation and argument, meditation and prayer. If any of these things are stimulated or improved as a result of reading this report and acting on its suggestions, then it has done some good.

If this report simply helps the next WICAS Secretary to understand the past as she plans for the future, that too will be of great benefit. I submit this report to the LWF with thanks and appreciation for the joy that has been mine, as I shared in this great ministry and mission of the Communion.

Musimbi Kanyoro
31 January, 1998

About this report

Introduction

The ten years between the close of Eva von Hertzberg's term in 1987 and the departure of Musimbi Kanyoro in January 1998 have seen two Assemblies of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), one Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), important global conferences such as the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) and the LWF's International Consultation on Women (ICW) 1995, plus innumerable seminars and discussions of considerable significance. The LWF and the WCC underwent major restructuring in response to changes in the ecumenical and financial environment. WICAS itself instigated a major policy initiative with its *Clear Plan of Action*. Those ten years also overlap with the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–98). Any one of these events could justify an assessment of WICAS at this time; taken together, they demand it.

It was a challenging task to study the structure, history and work of WICAS over the last ten years and to make assessments and recommendations. The sheer volume of work produced by WICAS – publications, training programmes, conferences, seminars and workshops, and consultations carried out by a small staff – is impressive. The tremendous hard work, faith and courage of the WICAS team is commendable. There is no doubt that WICAS provides a valuable service and plays a vital role in improving the status and participation of women as equal partners in the Lutheran Communion. A review at this stage should help to strengthen its work.

The scope of WICAS's activities is very wide. We did not carry out an independent survey of WICAS programmes and neither did we have any direct contributions from their principal beneficiaries – women in the member churches of the LWF in the regions. However, we met with the immediate support network of WICAS – the Regional Coordinators – through whom we gained a glimpse of the circumstances of women in member churches. There were also numerous reports and many useful studies, plus a vast collection of documents and correspondence for the team to study, many of which detailed the facts and issues affecting women in a variety of contexts.

What this report sets out to do

This assessment required that we familiarize ourselves with the past before we could describe the present and make recommendations for the future. We quickly learned to place WICAS in the context of the Department for Mission and Development and the Lutheran World Federation as a whole.

When the LWF was founded in 1947, women's participation in its own decision-making bodies and those of its member churches was virtually non-existent. Lutheran women themselves advocated for the inclusion of women in the LWF and the decision to establish a unit for women within the Federation was made in 1970. The Women's Desk, currently known as Women in Church and Society (WICAS), was organized in 1972 as a Desk of continuing education for women. Since its inception, much has been achieved by the Desk in

- building awareness of and reflecting theologically from an inclusive, human perspective;
- promoting awareness of the social and cultural obstacles to women's equal participation in church and society at all levels;
- empowering women for leadership within the Lutheran community;
- providing opportunities for women to meet together locally, regionally and internationally, in order to strategize and to support each other's efforts to attain equal participation within the structures of the LWF and its member churches.

However, much remains to be done, expressed by one African woman theologian as follows:

The LWF, especially WICAS, is a very important tool for us women. We must however be aware that the LWF itself is far ahead in its way of working with women, compared to its member churches, especially those that I know. This is part of our dilemma as women in these churches. I often do not see a clear relation between our participation in the events and work of the national churches and that of the LWF or the international ecumenical gatherings. We feel more accepted outside than at home, where we could render our services and use our talents in a more intense and consistent way.

Women in the Lutheran Tradition
Report of the 1991 International Consultation of
Lutheran Women Theologians

Criteria and indicators

What is the best way of measuring progress and identifying limitations? It is natural to try to keep ambiguities at bay by searching out and sticking to hard facts. But fact is sometimes hard to distinguish from fiction. When a male church leader reports that women's theological study is not an issue in his church, is it a fact or a phantasy? If it is a fact, then we have to investigate *why* it is a fact: understanding causes and contexts can place facts in a new light and reveal them to be rather less monolithic and unquestionable than they first appear.

An early and constant priority of this evaluation was to develop criteria for the success or failure of WICAS's activities and then to find precise indicators for those criteria. Though we have identified some indicators, we discovered that measurable data had not been collected systematically for the purpose of making an evaluation. The difficulties we encountered in this task informed our whole approach to the work and led to specific recommendations about the need for measurable criteria. This does not mean that we were unable to locate *any* measurable criteria. However, figures and statistics – while undoubtedly significant – cannot be taken at face value. Nor can they reflect the changing priorities of women through time.

Some facts and figures are available and have been used, but many more of them are out of reach, dispersed across the regions and in churches and women's groups throughout the world. We recommend that appropriate criteria be identified when drawing up the future programmes of WICAS, along with ways of measuring them, so that they are an integral part of all WICAS programmes.

Fortunately, there are other ways of describing states of affairs, of equal validity and analytical power. One of them is to compare people's stories. For example, if a male church leader says one thing and the women in his congregation say another, then there exists an interesting divergence of opinion which requires investigation and explanation. If such a divergence is part of a larger pattern of divergence seen elsewhere, then it can begin to be explained. If one learns more about the church, the area in which it is located, the cultural and economic environment in which it operates, the circumstances of the community to which it belongs, the kind of national church structure to which it is affiliated, the state of the nation and its politics, then one has enough detailed knowledge to know what is overwhelmingly likely to be the case in one particular congregation. One can then compare that with the model one has of the way the world is – in this case, the relevant model describes gender oppression and patriarchal hegemony.

This, in essence, is the approach of WICAS. In particular, it listens to women's stories, stories which have seldom been heard by the powerful, nor felt to be worth recording and preserving. This report in turn relies on such stories and on the story WICAS tells about itself. By comparing these stories and checking

them for internal consistency, we hope we have been enabled to tell a truthful story of our own. In this way, stories and the individuals who relate them provide many of our criteria and indicators for success and failure.

Approach and methodology

After an initial analysis of the documents provided, in order better to focus our study we felt it necessary to condense the extensive list of objectives and activities in *A Clear Plan of Action* into five broad objectives and five main programme areas, reproduced below. We also identified some tentative indicators of success, also listed below. These were then verified with the staff of WICAS and the Regional Coordinators.

Vision

WICAS envisions:

- the round table: equal participation of men and women at all levels, in all aspects of church and community life; and freedom from gender oppression and discrimination.

Values

WICAS affirms:

- women's faith, women's hope and women's actions rooted in the Good News of the Bible;
- the dignity of women as created in the image of God and therefore as equal partners with men in church and society;
- the full participation of all persons regardless of gender, age, race and physical condition in the witness of their faith in the spirit of ecumenism and internationalism.

Context

WICAS recognizes a global context in which:

- gender bias against women exists everywhere;
- hierarchical and masculine church structures share in this bias, legitimized by culture, tradition, theology and church practice;
- terrible inequalities exist: among them, the unjust accumulation and distribution of wealth, resources and power; the sexist devaluation and brutalization of women; and the official neglect of the most vulnerable members of the human family.

But also a context in which:

- women are organizing and empowering themselves;
- women's theological and cultural perspectives have in some regions already brought about or started to bring about significant changes in church and society;
- women have already succeeded in placing gender issues on the agendas of mainstream international bodies such as the UN, NGOs and church organizations.

Objectives (summarized from *A Clear Plan of Action*)

WICAS aims to:

- equip women for full partnership in the life and mission of the family, church and society;
- achieve justice and defend the human rights of women;
- facilitate the education of women in the social, cultural, economic, environmental and political realities of the world;
- incorporate women's theological perspectives into the thought and teaching of LWF member churches;
- ensure equal access for women to theological education and ordination.

The WICAS programme

WICAS implements the objectives listed above by means of five major programme areas which we have regrouped for this report under the following headings:

- 1 Women and theology
- 2 Gender and culture
- 3 Leadership development
- 4 Solidarity and advocacy
- 5 Justice and human rights

Indicators

We have identified the following indicators as a way of measuring success in this assessment. They could be developed as a means of measuring WICAS's performance in the future.

I Women and theology

- Use of feminist theology in church, Bible studies, Sunday schools and seminaries.
- Ordination of women.
- Women in leadership positions in local, national and international church structures.
- Numbers of theologically trained women and their networks.
- Inclusion of theologically trained women in ecumenical dialogues, international meetings and in church polity.
- Women teachers in Lutheran theological institutions.
- Acquisition of books on women's perspectives in theology by libraries and bookshops.

II Gender and culture

- Men and women sharing leadership roles.
- Men and women sharing in domestic chores.
- Men and women analysing their cultures and their theology.
- Joint involvement of men and women in identifying the needs of their communities and churches.
- Existence of programmes and projects to combat violence and discrimination based on gender, race, age, etc.
- Education within churches, groups and families that analyses cultures, so that people can be helped to retain what is positive and abolish what is harmful.
- Resolutions and guidelines that assist activists within the church to rally around issues.

III Leadership development, education, training and formation

- Greater or less participation of women in the activities, Assemblies and offices of the LWF.
- Greater or less participation of women in decision-making positions and bodies.
- Greater or less awareness (increase or decrease in discussion) of women's issues in the agendas of the LWF and its member churches at all levels.
- Identification of problems and priorities.
- Increased or decreased actions/activities in priority areas.
- Use of documentation and publications produced by WICAS, both within the LWF secretariat and by member churches (documenting the problems and the actions of women in the Lutheran churches – a means of raising awareness).

- The visibility of women's contributions in the life of church and society – as valuable, equal and essential – as depicted in church magazines, LWF documents, studies, reports, etc.

IV Solidarity and advocacy

- The existence of different networks supporting the work and issues of women in the church and in the LWF.
- The sharing of resource persons and resource materials between denominations and organizations.
- Strong programmes of information dissemination on various topics to interested persons.
- The sharing of leadership in women's networks by means of rotation leadership, planning and executing programmes together, and generally affirming women in leadership.
- New ways of reading the scriptures which make use of solidarity stories in the Bible and encourage women to adopt methods of solidarity in support of each other's issues and to learn to deal with differences in a positive way.

V Justice and human rights

- The recognition and identification of discrimination and violence against women.
- The status of women in church and society.
- The inclusion of human rights issues concerning women in the agendas and programmes of the LWF and member churches.
- Resolutions in favour of women's human rights in the minutes of LWF Assemblies and Council.
- Women organizing for justice and human rights.

Finding out about WICAS

The information upon which this report is based was acquired during an intensive ten-day period in the WICAS office in November 1997. Two days were spent in exhaustive discussion and planning within the evaluation team and with WICAS staff to arrive at an agreed interpretation of the task and its parameters. The evaluation team spent most of the next week sitting in on a meeting of

WICAS's Regional Coordinators (RCs) from around the world. This was an enriching and invaluable experience that provided up-to-date information on regional concerns and activities; that illustrated how RCs interacted with each other, church Liaison Persons and WICAS staff; that did much to clarify the structures and the constraints under which WICAS works. Discussions and informal talks with RCs elicited more insights, while precise feedback was provided by a brief questionnaire devised and circulated by the team to the RCs present at the meeting.

The team also collected and read the first batch of written materials from WICAS, which included:

- the terms of reference for the work;
- a complete backlist of WICAS's bi-annual magazine *Women*;
- key policy documents such as *A Clear Plan of Action* and *We are Witnesses*;
- important books such as *The Continuing Journey* and *In Search of a Round Table*;
- agendas and minutes to LWF Council meetings;
- minutes of staff meetings in the LWF's Department for Mission and Development;
- relevant background materials such as *Living Letters*.

These materials were later augmented with files of correspondence, the reports of Regional Coordinators, documents specially prepared and collated for the team, and specialist publications relating to the principles and procedures of evaluating and reporting. Most of these materials were taken away by the team. The staff of WICAS were very helpful and we appreciate their cooperation and assistance.

All these sources of information – people and publications – provided the raw data for this report. While it may have proved interesting and helpful to speak directly with a representative sample of women in LWF member churches in the various regions, it was impracticable. We believe that the information to which we did have access was sufficient to enable us to make an evaluative review of the main achievements, strengths and weaknesses of the WICAS programme and to make some recommendations.

After studying the information and our terms of reference, and then discussing them with the WICAS Secretary, we narrowed the scope of our work to a more general review of progress made towards achieving WICAS's objectives in all main programme areas.

2

Description of programme and executing organization

WICAS: A brief overview

As a result of the restructuring of the LWF in 1990, after the Eighth Assembly, WICAS moved from the Department of Studies to the Department for Mission and Development (DMD). The work of WICAS is supervised by the Director of DMD, Péri Rasolondraibe, who reports to the General Secretary of the LWF, Ishmael Noko. WICAS programmes are carried out by two full-time DMD staff members, the WICAS Secretary, Musimbi Kanyoro, and Ana Villaneuva, Administrative Assistant.

WICAS operates within the framework of the terms of reference of the Department for Mission and Development and relates specifically to the department's mandate to 'advocate inclusive patterns of full participation of women and men... in the lives of church and society'. WICAS works with a network of Lutheran women, among which are Regional Coordinators, Liaison Persons, women from ecumenical movements and NGOs.

Regional Coordinators

In 1988 WICAS's RCs (called Consultants at the time) numbered two in Africa and two in Asia. Their visits and contacts in remote regions were key factors in building confidence and trust between church leaders, women leaders and women at the grassroots, who were often unaware of the ways in which they could help themselves by organized means. It was quickly recognized that RCs were vital to the effectiveness of WICAS and that their numbers should be increased.

Today, WICAS has a worldwide support network of 15–17 Regional Coordinators. RCs represent their regions and help WICAS identify regional needs and devise programmes to meet those needs. RCs organize workshops in their regions, visit churches and maintain contacts with national women's work

in LWF member churches. They also represent WICAS staff at regional events and at international gatherings as the need arises.

RCs are nominated in women's regional gatherings by the churches' official women delegates. Their term of service is three years, for a maximum of two terms. Nominations must be endorsed by the nominee's own church. RCs devote at least six weeks a year to LWF-related activities. They receive a small honorarium, and any expenses incurred while on WICAS business are paid by the LWF.

In 1979–81 the major areas of responsibility for RCs as outlined at the time were:

- 1 Visiting member churches, women's organizations and women leaders to identify the needs of women and note requests for possible programmes.
- 2 Report identified needs and requests within the endorsement of the church/national committee to the Women's Desk and help formulate programmes to meet these needs.
- 3 Contact and cooperate with other organizations or agencies which are, or could be, alerted to respond to identified needs of women.
- 4 Help the Women's Desk in planning, execution and follow-up of workshops and seminars in their respective areas.
- 5 Cooperate with the Women's Desk in the planning, execution and follow-up of regional consultation.
- 6 Assist in identifying resource persons for seminars, workshops and consultations.
- 7 Assist in identifying capable young women to be involved in programme participation and leadership.
- 8 Assist in the implementation of participatory research programmes.
- 9 Contribute to the ongoing process of conscientization of both women and men for building a renewed partnership in church and society.

Subjects highlighted during this period were women's role in church and society, and leadership training. In this sense, not much has changed over the last ten years. Many of the concerns, priorities and issues remain the same: leadership, cultural barriers to women's full and equal participation in church and society – the same things crop up time and again. In other senses, however, things have changed dramatically: the accumulated experience of many women over many years means that those issues which constantly recur can be tackled with insight and vision. The wealth of knowledge at WICAS's disposal has increased; the Desk and the women with whom it works have invested their talents wisely. Neither must one forget that behind those recurring issues there are countless women whose lives have been touched and who have been supported and empowered in their struggles. Some things, therefore, really have changed for the better.

The differences and similarities between regions of the world are both intriguing and problematical. How do you coordinate a response to issues and develop strategies? How can you prioritize different lists of priorities?

Regional Coordinators are a major part of the answer to these questions. The team responsible for this report were impressed by the dedication and commitment of the RCs it met. Many RCs work under very difficult conditions, both personal and societal. Their knowledge of local and regional issues – and their local and regional contacts – make RCs an incredibly valuable part of the WICAS team. Their interactions with one another are extremely impressive: together, they are living proof that connections can be made between people and issues, local and global, and that from these connections, policies and strategies can be formulated.

Findings

(1)

RCs often work in conditions of extreme difficulty and even personal danger. Remote regions and difficult terrain cause problems of communication. Long distances and poor communications infrastructures – no roads or an unreliable postal service – mean that even simple communication is a real problem. War and conflict can prevent RCs working at all.

(2)

Ways need to be found to strengthen and equip RCs for the work they want to do, rather than the problems they are forced to overcome. Training women for leadership, promoting women as leaders, enabling women to assume responsibilities by equipping them with the necessary skills and confidence – all these things have direct implications for the work of RCs. The more such work expands, the more it can be shared, resulting in greater efficiencies, savings and benefits.

(3)

As in so many areas of WICAS's work, the personal qualities of RCs and WICAS staff, plus the quality of their personal interactions and relationships, are extremely important. Mutual trust, confidence and enthusiasm are vital: simply put, the new WICAS Secretary will need to continue the tradition of wide-ranging professionalism coupled with highly developed, natural, interpersonal skills.

Liaison Persons

In 1992 the LWF Council recommended that each church appoint a Liaison Person to liaise with WICAS in promoting issues related to the churches' plans of action. Liaison Persons are the officially designated national contacts of member churches for communication with WICAS. They interpret the situation of women in their church and make recommendations for action to their church and to WICAS.

Regional Coordinators and Liaison Persons work in partnership with WICAS staff to:

- maintain a record on the status of women in LWF member churches and in the regions;
- promote joint activities among churches within the same country and region;
- inform women in the regions about the LWF Communion of churches;
- encourage churches to implement decisions of past Assemblies in regard to women;
- help WICAS implement the issues identified in *A Clear Plan of Action* and *We are Witnesses*;
- help WICAS to evaluate its programmes in different churches and regions.

Cooperation with other organizations

Working ecumenically has been integral to WICAS since its inception. Cooperation with other Christians as well as with secular organizations is a regular practice of WICAS, in line with DMD priorities. Many events are organized jointly with the World Council of Churches or National Councils of Churches in different regions. A close working relationship exists with European Development Agencies through the Gender Orientation on Development (GOOD) network. There are working relations on some events with the World Union of Catholic Women Organizations (WUCWO), World Federation of Methodist Women (WFMW), World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW), World Young Women's Christian Association (World-YWCA), World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) and others. There is also frequent communication with regional ecumenical bodies such as the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the All Africa Conference of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI). WICAS also associates with networks of women such as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, the Asian Women Resource Center, and others. WICAS's work with NGOs and UN-related agencies is within this programme and WICAS takes the lead in some NGO initiatives. Planning and participation for Beijing is one example where WICAS worked with several NGOs.

Cooperation with other organizations includes organizing events jointly, preparing resource material, advocacy, exchanging information, and mutual invitations to events. In all of these, there are financial implications.

Planning and implementation of activities with other organizations is also a joint responsibility with partners. Activities for the end of the Ecumenical Decade are planned together with the World Council of Churches Women's units.

Purpose and aims

- To promote ecumenism.
- To encourage women in Lutheran churches to work ecumenically.
- To cooperate with other organizations with similar interests on women.
- To make known to Lutheran churches the work of the United Nations and NGOs concerning women.

WICAS programmes are funded under the following programme headings:

Continuing education and consultative services

Continuing education is a capacity-building programme and one of the most popular in WICAS's work. The beneficiaries are often lay women in the congregations who have no other possibilities for participating in an educational event. The Continuing Education Programme affirms the different gifts of women found at various levels in the church. Its functions are:

- to provide consultative services to the churches, which include the provision of resource persons in specialized areas at the request of the churches;
- to sponsor exchange between groups of women for mutual learning;
- to respond to applications from individuals or groups of women in Lutheran churches to attend short-term educational events that contribute to their being equipped for further service in church and society;
- to enable women in the congregations to have access to resource material such as books, posters, calendars, educational videos, etc. to enhance their work in workshops, seminars and other educational events.

Purpose and aims

- To affirm women in the work they do in congregations.
- To enable women to develop their different gifts for use in church and society.
- To encourage community learning which women have developed over many years.
- To enable exchange between women from different churches in the same region or inter-regionally.
- To respond to invitations from churches for resource persons and thus support resource sharing.

- To respond to in-country and regional exchanges based on the application of churches.
- To provide resource materials in accordance with the needs of the women in the churches.
- To sponsor women for short courses.

Research and social analysis

Research is an integral part of WICAS programmes. One of WICAS's reasons for being is to encourage churches to initiate studies and actions which motivate people to change negative attitudes towards women; to encourage Lutheran women to do social analysis and pursue literacy in economic, legal, political and other areas as needs dictate; to cooperate with the Department for Theology and Studies on making women's issues and perspectives visible in theology; to follow up on the implementation of research on women, recommended by the Assembly, the Council and other LWF-related groups.

Purpose and aims

- To provide possibilities for reforming and renovating the WICAS programme in response to changing times.
- To provide space for women's voices to be heard and read.
- To enable Lutheran women to write and publish their work.
- To provide researched data for the statements that are made by women in the churches and society.

Publications and communications

Women is the regular magazine of WICAS, published twice a year with a circulation of 3,500. It is published only in English. It is the only extensive link between the office of WICAS and women in the churches. Its value is assessed by the letters received, both from individuals and from libraries all over the world, and the mailing list is constantly increasing.

In addition to the publication of *Women*, WICAS publishes books, and reports of research, workshops and conferences. (See Appendix 5 for a list of WICAS publications.) It also uses other communications media such as video, posters, calendars, cards, etc., for particular events, as needs arise.

Purpose and aims

- To provide connections to women and the churches on the global situation of women.
- To provide a forum for exchange of ideas and programmes from different churches.
- To inform about and to document special concerns and issues relating to women.

- To encourage women's groups and organizations in their work.
- To provide information about the work of WICAS, the LWF, the ecumenical movement, NGOs, the UN, especially about their work with women.

Special Fund for the Promotion of Women

The Special Fund was initiated in 1989. Its purpose is to accompany the churches in their activities in relation to the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. Although the fund is lodged in the Office of WICAS, it responds to requests made of the Federation as a whole. The fund is governed by special criteria agreed between donors and the LWF. Among the criteria is a ceiling of US\$5,000 per applicant per year. Applications may come from a member church, an ecumenical body or other organization, but must be endorsed by an LWF member church or an ecumenical council. Between 1990 and 1997 WICAS funded 116 projects with a total grant of US\$412,364. (A special WICAS report on the fund describes the projects funded and it is available on request from the LWF.) During the International Consultation on Women (ICW) in 1995, many reports indicated that churches have not completely absorbed the visions of the decade and work will need to continue after 1998.

In consultation with area desks, WICAS staff coordinate applications for presentation to the Project Staff Working Team, which decides on the use of the fund. Funds are disbursed to the churches throughout the year. Attempts are made to respond as quickly as possible to requests and implementation is followed up. Financial and programme implementation reports are obligatory for every funded event.

Purpose and aims

- To empower churches to participate in the objectives of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.
- To respond to requests for assistance within the limits of the fund's criteria.

Women in theology

The study of theology by women is significant to the church. The number of women trained in theology and serving church and society in both lay and ordained capacities has been increasing steadily over the years. These women continually call for new understandings of the church so that their presence and contribution can be taken into account. This has emerged especially in ecumenical contexts which have included Lutheran women, but have not provided sufficient opportunity for them to focus on particular issues and challenges facing them because of their religious heritage.

The Programme for Women in Theology was established in 1989. Since 1991, regional networks of Lutheran women have been coordinated by women in member churches. They meet occasionally, sharing experiences as women clergy,

finding ways to encourage women to study theology and support female students at theological institutions. A number of WICAS publications have stemmed from this programme.

Purpose and aims

- To encourage women to study theology.
- To affirm the ordination of women.
- To support ordained women.
- To affirm and promote women's perspectives in theology.
- To provide space for women theologians to do their reflections in theology.
- To encourage churches to incorporate women's theology into worship, congregational life, theological education, church administration and church theology and practice.
- To sustain regional networks of women theologians established in 1991.
- To sponsor women theologians and pastors to theological conferences.
- To provide books on women's theology to students who have no such resources in their library.

Justice and advocacy

On issues of justice, the integrity of the church is at stake. Because we confess a just God, we are moved to work for justice.

Women are often victims of injustice and human rights violations. Injustice to women comes in many forms: discrimination; the violence of people and structures; denial of access to education, property or participation; or trivialization of women and their contributions as persons. Sometimes, injustice is so subtle that it passes as culture, theology or a societal norm. Even as children, women are not safe. Special tactics are often required to draw attention to issues of injustice and to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

Purpose and aims

- To empower women to challenge injustice.
- To make visible women's perspectives and actions in the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation and reconciliation.
- To encourage churches to undertake investigation of issues of justice for women in social, economic, cultural and theological spheres.
- To raise the level of awareness in churches about women's human rights.
- To exert influence to change policies that are harmful to human beings and to connect the work of the UN and NGOs to that of the churches in relation to all aspects of human rights, justice and peace.
- To continue to advocate for issues of justice and human rights for women.

International events

Background

WICAS's national and regional networks are mandated to organize events in their respective localities, which leaves the Geneva secretariat responsible for occasional international events.

Providing opportunities for Lutheran women to participate in the agendas of the United Nations is important. Through WICAS, the LWF participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The United Nations 'commission' on the Status of Women (CSW) is the body that prepared and will follow-up the implementation of the results of the Conference and a programme was drawn up which focuses on particular areas of the *Platform of Action*. The commission meets every year in March in New York. The LWF usually has five places to send observers. Those who have attended the commission have reported having their eyes opened to new horizons. In order to keep up the momentum on the follow-up to the Beijing Conference, WICAS plans to facilitate the presence of women from Lutheran churches at every commission meeting until the year 2000.

Purpose and aims

- To live out our possibilities as a communion of churches by maintaining contact with one another.
- To enable Lutheran women to participate in international events.

Leadership development programme

In every gathering of women from LWF member churches, leadership development is mentioned as a priority need, and thus it has also become the first priority for WICAS. Leadership, a highly visible public activity, requires a certain amount of self-confidence, a willingness to take risks, to be held up to public scrutiny, and to exercise and convey a sense of power. The purpose of leadership development is to empower women to take up their role as partners in the community of men and women.

The main emphasis of this programme is education for formation and transformation. Equipping women with the skills they need for leadership and promoting the use of the gifts of women are two sides to this programme. Gender sensitivity is the basis of its approach.

Purpose and aims

- To accompany women in their own capacity-building efforts (see *A Clear Plan of Action*).
- To assist churches in the formation and transformation of resource persons.

- To create awareness of the importance of women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels.
- To equip women with needed skills of analysis on various issues and at various levels as needed.

Other WICAS activities

WICAS staff are frequently invited as resource persons to events organized by member churches, partner agencies, ecumenical organizations and NGOs. In many cases, funding for travel and accommodation is provided by the inviting body. To research these areas, papers written by staff, travel reports and travel forms, plus letters and evaluations from the inviting bodies will be important.

WICAS maintains a data bank on women and services for the LWF or other people in need of women with special skills. WICAS serves on a number of staff working groups, such as the staff working group on Projects, Scholarships, Human Rights, etc. On all of these groups, WICAS brings a gender focus and thus maintains an in-house advocacy role.

Within the WCC, WICAS participates in working groups on Women. It also participates in several NGO working groups on Women.

The LWF and WICAS: A brief history

The work of the LWF is mandated from Assembly to Assembly. It is now an established practice to hold a women's consultation some months prior to each Assembly.

In 1970 the Fifth LWF Assembly authorized the establishment of WICAS, which was set up in 1972 with one part-time staff member. The Assembly decision was prompted by the recommendations of a Pre-Assembly Conference for Women, held in Sweden in 1969.

Percentage targets for women's participation in Assemblies were decided at the Budapest (1984) and Curitiba (1989) Assemblies. These decisions effectively established the goals for WICAS's work from 1984–90. Eva von Hertzberg set out to achieve these goals and her work was continued by Musimbi Kanyoro.

The Budapest Assembly became a turning point in women's work in the LWF. Before Budapest, women more or less worked alone on women's issues; afterwards, the whole Federation committed itself to work for women. However, women still possessed the necessary expertise and experience, and therefore continued to guide the Federation and its member churches.

By 1989 changes in the roles and perceptions of women were still very gradual and were more evident in the LWF organization itself than in its member churches. The number of women executives increased slightly, but a request made to member churches to propose female candidates for vacant and new positions was often neglected.

In the Eighth LWF Assembly at Curitiba in 1990, 43 per cent of delegates were women and there was a 50/50 split with men in the allocation of speakers. Women were also appointed to form 41.5 per cent of the new Council and Executive Committee of the LWF. At the Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong in 1997, 49.3 percent of the delegates were women and 43 percent of the members elected to the Council were women.

Significant as these numbers were, they were no longer the primary measure for assessing women's participation. Percentages were still important, but women looked to the long-term commitment of the LWF and the Assembly to issues affecting women in the life of the church and the world.

The Assembly's commitments formed and informed a future direction for programmes and actions. In Curitiba the Assembly declared:

We commit ourselves and our member churches to intensify our efforts to be a sign of an inclusive communion in the world. To that end we will:

- 1 Work out a clear plan of action in every member church which fully expresses the equality of men and women within the life of the church and enables the churches to benefit from the potential which women are able to give to all areas of church life;
- 2 undertake, through consultation and cooperation of all member churches and in a climate of mutual respect, practical efforts to open the way for women to enter the ordained ministry of all our member churches;
- 3 initiate and participate in programmes of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.

Curitiba delegates gave formal approval to a constitutional statement which makes clear that the churches of the Federation understand themselves to be an expression of the worldwide communion of Lutheran churches (instead of a 'free association'). Curitiba also agreed to a massive restructuring of the LWF, leading to WICAS's transfer to the Department for Mission and Development (DMD), where it was to

foster among member churches awareness, study, research, and analysis of issues relating to the promotion of equality between women and men and the full participation of women in all aspects of church and community life in member churches worldwide.

Curitiba's commitment to a clear plan of action for every church undergirded WICAS's work. A *Clear Plan of Action* was presented to the LWF Council in

Madras in 1992. The Council adopted the plan and requested member churches to develop their own plans, studies and actions.

We are Witnesses

The LWF's 1995 International Consultation on Women (ICW) gave increased impetus to a gender-based approach which focuses on men as well as women. The 165 participants suggested ways of guiding churches in the task of incorporating into their work the *Platform for Action* from the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995): the result was *We are Witnesses*.

We are Witnesses identifies six issues urgently requiring programmatic action by churches:

- Living in communion
- Sitting at the table as equals
- Ordination of women
- Education and leadership training
- Economic justice
- Safe places for women and children in church and society

with proposals for actions for each one.

The content of these issues is closely related to those outlined in *A Clear Plan of Action*, but *We are Witnesses* is more specific and direct in naming who must get involved to bring about change. Fifty member churches from all regions of the world reported their most pressing issues as:

- 1 Human rights for women
- 2 Poverty and economic issues
- 3 Education
- 4 Health
- 5 Women in the context of family
- 6 Violence against women
- 7 Environment

By the close of 1995 12 of the 122 member churches reported they had developed their own clear plan of action, while 67 had appointed Liaison Persons.

Partnership and communion – important concepts in the LWF's understanding of itself and in the work of WICAS throughout the period under review – continue to be stressed. In 1997, two of the LWF's goals were to:

- strengthen Lutheran identity through the continued exploration of the theological and practical implications of being a communion of churches;

- broaden our understanding of partnership in a variety of areas (e.g. women and men, young and old, clergy and lay, north and south, east and west) in the LWF.

The LWF's Ninth Assembly follow-up of resolutions includes the 'Empowerment of women as a means of full inclusion in society'. It calls on member churches and the LWF secretariat to

- promote economic literacy and leadership training workshops, seminars and consultations for women;
- assign a percentage of the global budget to programmes and projects which aim to empower women;
- create programmes of investment and small-scale credit accessible to women;
- assure that the programmes of the LWF and WICAS are well funded;
- reaffirm and follow-up the goals of the Ecumenical Decade, which ends in 1998;
- instil gender awareness and make sure that gender is taken seriously in all projects to be developed by ensuring that they are considered and approved by a balanced gender group;
- call on the Council to ensure that only those theological schools which provide equal access to theological education for both women and men receive funds from the LWF.

These sorts of regulatory strategy are helpful and necessary, but they can only do so much. Attitudes and beliefs, traditions and practices, cannot be changed or eliminated by regulation alone. They have to be changed by education, training, persuasion and experience. Such things can only be done by people.

Summary of developments

In essence, from the beginning of WICAS in 1972 to the Budapest Assembly in 1984, the focus was on a renewed community with women's full participation. It was easy to agree on goals because the lack of women's participation was obvious. The first priority was to get women involved, to work on awareness building and conscientization, to begin opening up church structures to women's participation. New and challenging theological arguments had to be developed in order to do this.

From 1984–90, increasingly, women became participants, inside rather than outside church structures. It was less easy to agree on goals and strategies, different opinions were expressed, and there was a need to establish unity in diversity.

Theologically, the task has changed from establishing a safe and sure foundation for women's participation, to encouraging the growth everywhere of women

doing theology for themselves, especially at the grassroots. Since the beginning of WICAS, but especially since the Curitiba Assembly, women have contributed to the renewal of theology by working through dominant traditions: rethinking and re-examining them, and complementing and correcting them from women's perspectives.

Over the last ten years in particular, WICAS, Christian world communions, NGOs, UN agencies and other international bodies and conferences have steadily converged in terms of opinions, priorities and policies. WICAS's close involvement in Beijing in 1995 and the inclusive nature of the ICW in the same year underscore the value and benefits of this convergence. Concerted action and solidarity are now possible as never before. Poised on the edge of a new era, WICAS can choose to extend, abandon or revise *A Clear Plan of Action* in order to equip itself and LWF member churches for the new millennium.

3

Findings

I Women and theology

Our participation in reshaping the social, political and economic structures, as well as changing the patriarchal structures within the churches, is one of our major challenges.

Churches have up until now not really faced the underlying causes for the existing lack of women's participation. Sexism is a theological issue, a corporate sickness in the body of Christ that keeps all from being whole and well. Sexism, like racism, distorts our societies and Christian communities. But the churches are slow in recognizing that sexism is indeed a theological issue.

Eva von Hertzberg, June 1986

The church – what it is and *where* it is – is at the heart of WICAS's concerns. Issues surrounding women's ordination and women doing theology are the recurring themes of the last ten years. These issues are of vital importance in themselves and are also deeply symbolic: they represent key indications of progress and eventual 'arrival'. For this reason, in part, and because of their institutional nature, they have more measures of success attached than any other areas.

Women's ordination, women doing theology and the nature of the church are deeply interrelated and have revolutionary implications, which is perhaps why they are usually the focus of so much conservative reactionism and entrenched sexism. When the church is permeated by the symbols and liturgies of inclusiveness and partnership, then understandings, beliefs and doctrine cannot remain unaffected. To the extent that it is a patriarchal institution, the church often finds this frightening and threatening; to the extent that it becomes more truly itself, it finds it liberating and empowering.

In 1987 WICAS prepared a 'Progress Report on Women's Participation in the LWF and in the Member Churches'. The report recognized the achievements of women and their increasing participation in the life and work of the churches

and the LWF. It was distributed to the then LWF Executive Committee, which went on to confirm the goal of 40 per cent women's participation at the Curitiba Assembly. The report followed-up the letter of LWF General Secretary Gunnar Staalsett to the Federation's 104 member churches, which stressed the importance of the participation of women in the mission and ministries of the church. Only eight member churches responded to issues raised in the letter. The report concluded that 'the church is largely a mirror of its environment regarding questions concerning justice, the recognition of human values and dignity, and the offer of equal opportunities'.

The Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women 1988–98 is a sign of growing awareness and responsibility within the ecumenical movement. It had been hoped that the UN Decade for Women (1975–85) would affect a radical improvement in women's lives. Instead, most women faced more difficult conditions than they had 15 or 20 years before. The Ecumenical Decade asks the churches to recognize God's call for justice, inclusiveness and power sharing. It reminds us that the prophetic tradition encourages the oppressed to rise up and struggle for justice and love, and the whole people of God to live and work in solidarity with the oppressed to end their oppression.

The numbers of women participating at LWF Assemblies and in the decision-making apparatus of member churches is an important indication of progress. Such figures should be approached cautiously, however, since they may mask the deeper exclusion of women in terms of attitudes and behaviour. As LWF General Secretary Ishmael Noko has commented, numbers are 'a corrective measure, necessary in order to achieve our main goal, which is the change of attitude toward women'. He went on to say that 'it is imperative that the commitments member churches make together at formal gatherings such as Assemblies and Council meetings are also carried out in the everyday life of the home church and congregations'. The fact that such commitments are so often selectively ignored is a matter of grave concern.

A significant institutional barrier to women within the church is the lack of provision for female students of theology in some parts of the LWF constituency. Generally speaking, women do not teach at seminaries and theological schools and feminist theology is not on the curriculum. Churches in Asia and Africa have not encouraged or endorsed women candidates for theological studies. The objectives of incorporating women's perspectives in theology, in the thinking and teaching of LWF member churches, has not been achieved in a majority of the member churches, where the teaching of traditional patriarchal doctrines predominates. Much work remains to be done in this area. Similarly, ensuring equal access to women to theological education and ordination will continue to be of tremendous relevance to individual women and to the long-term sustainability of the church. WICAS's work in this area and in the provision of grassroots theological education must continue.

The sophistication and effectiveness of WICAS's descriptive-prescriptive theological approach to women and the church can be seen in the responses of its constituency in the pages of *Women* and in the penetration of that theology into the thinking of the LWF. A hermeneutical emphasis on stories has revealed how a male-oriented church has suppressed the contributions of women and other relatively powerless groups. In excavating biblical stories of women from layers of patriarchal interpretation, such a hermeneutics releases the Bible to empower women and other marginalized people. In as much as it connects the stories of women in the Bible with the stories of women alive today, it makes plain that God's redemptive power is at work now, this minute.

Findings

(1)

While a cursory glance at the last ten years reveals that the same issues still preoccupy the work and thinking of WICAS and the women it serves, this masks the real gains and developments which have taken place over the last decade. Women's ordination, for example, despite a recent backlash, is now in the forefront of the churches' minds and will not go away. The numbers of women participating in Assemblies and the decision-making apparatus of the LWF have also increased dramatically.

(2)

WICAS's emphasis on the crucial importance of theology to all its work and what it seeks to achieve in partnership with women has ensured the vitality of its work and its relevance to church women. It has helped keep alive women's hope and women's faith at a time when many of them are giving up on the church in one way or another. WICAS's promotion of feminist theology and theological studies for women leads to valuable synergies and savings. Theology is a discipline many church women naturally wish to explore for its own sake; if it also educates them about society, gender and culture, as well as helps equip them for leadership and even ordination, then its benefits are enormous.

(3)

There is no doubt that women look to the LWF for support in their own struggles within their own churches. It is therefore extremely disheartening when member churches do not adhere to the commitments and agreements made at LWF Assemblies. It is very difficult to understand and to live with the confusion, anger and disappointment this engenders.

(4)

WICAS has established itself as an LWF Desk which works – not as a separate women's organization – but as a unit for advocacy for the churches of

the communion. This niche is an extremely difficult one to occupy without alienating one or another group, or without spending so much energy on defending its corner that it becomes ineffectual. However, this balancing act requires continuous monitoring and vigilance (see 'Gender and culture', below).

(5)

Women magazine and the other publications of WICAS help provide some of the theological analysis from women's perspectives which is otherwise so seriously lacking. *Women* also communicates LWF news and highlights topical events, making information available to women who might not otherwise have any access to it.

2 Gender and culture

'Gender' refers to the ways in which roles, attitudes, values and relationships regarding women and men are constructed by all societies all over the world. The concepts and practices of equality and discrimination, determined by social, economic, religious and cultural factors lie at the heart of gender perspectives. Theological engagement with gender issues mirrors what is happening in society and extends to scripture and the teachings and practices of the church. People have long debated the roles and functions of women and men in the home, church and society, and have speculated as to whether these are prescribed by God or culturally determined. Some have argued that women and men are innately or ontologically different beings and therefore designed by nature to fulfil separate roles. The contra argument stresses the primacy of shared human nature that transcends cultural or historical particularities. Thus all human beings reflect the *Imago Dei*, irrespective of their sex, colour, economic or social circumstances. Women as well as men are made in the divine image of God; therefore any discrimination, domination or oppression is contrary to God's justice. Inclusiveness is an aspect of the justice of God which Jesus restored in his concern for those on the fringes.

LWF Ninth Assembly Study Book, 1997

The fact that gender roles differ significantly from one society to another and from one historical period to another is an indication that they are socially and culturally constructed. Gender analysis seeks to identify such injustice for men or women, and to suggest ways of correcting it by society. When injustice or discrimination are present, the whole society suffers, but especially those who are victimized.

Another aspect to the gender debate is how the history of societies is recorded. For example, the Bible names very few women, and many of those who are named are portrayed negatively – often as sexual objects and not as persons. Those few women named by the Bible as having contributed to the story of salvation and leadership of societies have been overlooked by church tradition. An appreciation of gender and theology inevitably leads to an examination of human sexuality.

Churches are prone to blame culture for their inaction on gender issues. On the other hand, there are plenty of examples of churches distancing themselves from a culture (or secular society) which is moving ahead to accord women their rightful place in society. Rather than being in the vanguard of change and aligned with the most progressive elements of society, such churches are instead bastions of conservatism and reactionism.

Culture and society can undermine the solidarity of church women and cause division. The splits often occur between older and younger women and/or conservative and radical women's organizations, and between races and classes and sexual orientations. Such splits are profoundly damaging. They alienate some women from the church and allow men to brand women as disorganized and unworthy of real leadership.

Many of the comments that follow about gender and culture reflect the views of Regional Coordinators, which were expressed in the meeting the evaluation team attended in November 1997. The meeting considered the pros and cons of a gender approach to the work of WICAS in the light of the strong emphasis placed on gender by the LWF International Consultation on Women and the resolution of the Hong Kong Assembly.

Is it possible to address effectively women's issues in particular, while at the same time to change the attitudes of men and wider society? In the late 1980s WICAS RCs were reported as saying that 'unless society at large changes, their work stood no chance of success. They therefore geared their programmes to the whole of society, but with a bias of influencing women to take up by themselves this fight for change.'

Striking the balance between different views is always difficult. How can WICAS, for example, seek to conscientize men without dropping its other commitments and failing to protect the gains already achieved? Regional Coordinators wondered if resources would be divided too much, thus reducing those resources originally allocated to women. Would men co-opt or take over if WICAS became a Gender Desk rather than a Women's Desk?

The answers to these questions have implications for all the work currently undertaken by WICAS. In any consideration of WICAS's role and WICAS's name, account must be taken of how women might view such a change and it's

possible repercussion on its work in the different regions it serves. A focus on gender is not theoretically incompatible with a focus on the specific concerns of women (indeed, it should be argued that a twin focus is absolutely essential), but in practical terms can such a dual role be undertaken by the Desk as presently organized? Can the structures of the LWF be shot through with gender awareness, so that its programmes and policies become similarly self-regulatingly gendered? Could WICAS remain WICAS if the LWF were to change in this way?

Findings

(1)

While men enjoy all the privileges and advantages of gender discrimination, their humanity – that which makes them truly themselves – is as much distorted as women's by the present state of affairs. Everyone – men and women, church and society – has everything to gain from a new partnership based on equality and respect.

(2)

Regional Coordinators expressed the view that, until the cultural determinants of inequality, oppression and sexist beliefs are removed, women will always hit a glass – or more often concrete – ceiling in their efforts at empowerment.

(3)

Regional Coordinators also commented that a gender orientation to WICAS has evolved over the last ten years, especially after the impetus given it by the 1995 ICW. Such an orientation will eventually require a structural mandate, so that WICAS can work to challenge everyone, not just women. Any combination of 'women's work' and 'gender work' has implications for the wider organizational structure of the LWF and for the Desk itself, in terms of who does what and who takes ultimate responsibility.

(4)

A gender approach already undergirds much of WICAS's analysis of women's participation in the LWF and LWF member churches. Once research goes beyond the numbers and percentages of women represented in decision-making bodies, it invariably raises questions concerning gender education for the eradication of sexist attitudes and beliefs.

(5)

The wider women's movement has faltered because many younger women enjoy the benefits won by feminism without seeing the need to fight the battles of their own day. Genuine change has in part been co-opted by media and materialist culture, covering over the gender inequalities of society at large. The church shares in this generational problem: younger women

are less attracted to an institution perceived as offering them little or nothing. A gender orientation could be the key to unlock the energies and commitment of younger people. Debate about gender continues to rage: some churches have already made the transition to a gender orientation.

(6)

Gender awareness is already 'on the table' for the LWF as a whole: the Ninth Assembly follow-up of resolutions includes the empowerment of women as a means for their full inclusion in society, to be secured by 'instilling gender awareness and making sure that gender is taken seriously in all projects to be developed, by ensuring that they are considered and approved by a balanced gender group'. This is part of the meaning of 'mainstreaming' women developed since Beijing.

(7)

Theology can either reinforce gender stereotypes and prejudicial cultural norms, or else it can restore gender relations and help establish new cultural norms. Much of WICAS's communication and encouragement of feminist theology is already from a gender perspective.

3 Leadership development

In every gathering of women from LWF member churches, leadership development is specified as a priority need, and thus it has become the first priority for WICAS. WICAS staff initiate, organize, co-organize, coordinate, facilitate, fund, or serve as key resource persons for a host of activities throughout the year, carried out at international, regional, national and local levels.

Leadership is invariably linked with education and training. Women recognize that they need the skills and knowledge traditionally denied them in order to take on leadership roles and accept responsibility. Hence, the need for leadership development such as the Young Women's International Leadership Training 1994–6, coordinated by WICAS/YICAS and implemented by DMD as a whole. Hence, also, the significance of the Special Fund for the Promotion of Women, which has enabled the LWF to respond to small requests from churches and women's organizations on initiatives which promote the development and partnership of women in church and society within the framework of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.

Within a church context, equipping women for leadership also means theological education, formally in seminaries and institutes of higher learning, and

informally by such means as study programmes for women leaders designed locally and supported by WICAS. Through in-service courses, trained theologians can accompany and guide women in the understanding of basic theological concepts, biblical interpretation, and service in the church.

Findings

(1)

Those women who do manage to secure positions of leadership within the church – whether as ordained persons or lay – are often isolated and lack support, even from other women in their church. Support structures and networks for women are an effective means of strengthening and empowering women leaders in an often indifferent or hostile church environment.

(2)

Resources for leadership training are a necessary investment for the future of women's ordination and leadership within the church. WICAS's primary emphasis on the facilitation of such training has multiple benefits for women: if they organize their own events they gain twice over in experience and expertise.

(3)

The issue of leadership has traditionally been the one most associated with numerical values and percentages. Numbers of women in leadership positions are a key indicator of progress, but such data has to be supplemented with anecdotal and background information which reveals underlying attitudes and behaviours. Sexism can hide quite comfortably behind large and small numbers.

Leadership education must include a clear analysis of power. Power is embodied in structures and is a relationship between participants in a community. Certain images of God underlie the use of power and together with biblical interpretation contribute to the shape and functioning of church structures. As more women move into decision-making bodies, it may be possible to revise current structures – to 'round the table' – to ensure a more inclusive and open community.

A woman leader in a local church context should be able, if she wishes, to be an activist and an educator, to raise awareness about gender issues, inclusive theology, new inclusive ways of functioning, and the relevance to both women and men of resolutions taken at the Hong Kong and earlier LWF Assemblies. She should be able to generate support and mobilize women and men in local communities to press for specific changes within church structures and practices, in order to create an inclusive church.

4 Solidarity and advocacy

We must not tell only the stories of suffering, struggles and failures. We must also tell about the good news that we find in the liberating experiences of reading the Bible with new eyes. To lose sight of the reality of the continued subjection of women in cultural and biblical interpretation is naive, but to be blind to the success of the victories and celebrations of women, or of the inherent goodness in culture, is to encourage pessimism.

Women editorial

Solidarity with women is a process and a condition that empowers people. It is a process in as much people move together and where the needs of exploited and underprivileged women determine the movement. It enables women to strive for and to have access to knowledge, skills and resources that give them confidence in their capability to take control over their lives through genuine participation.

Solidarity with women implies that the root causes of women's exploitation and oppression, their political and economic marginalization, are analysed and addressed, and that women's visions and experiences generate a new and living community.

Churches' solidarity with women is a process of change and transformation of patriarchal and hierarchical structures built on relationships of social injustice. It means ending oppression and beginning a new community which is responsive to the needs and visions, gifts and aspirations of women.

If one really had to choose a single thing above all others as the most important element of WICAS's work, its solidarity with the women it serves would be a strong candidate. The support and encouragement this solidarity provides is stressed time and again by women throughout the regions. Much of this encouragement springs from the belief that the LWF as a whole is an important ally of church women.

Solidarity shades into advocacy. To advocate means to speak for and on behalf of someone, to defend and promote their rights and interests in places where they might otherwise be forgotten or ignored. Advocacy has been a major component of WICAS's mandate since its inception and has been multi-directional: within departments and offices of the LWF; upward to the decision-making bodies of the LWF; outward to churches, NGOs and UN agencies and discussion forums. Much of this advocacy depends on the networks of contacts and support patiently constructed over the years.

One among many good examples of WICAS's advocacy was linked to the poor utilization of LWF scholarships for women. In July 1987 the LWF's Commission on Studies decided that 'at least 40 per cent of scholarship funds available for

each continent are to be set aside for women, beginning in 1988'; if they were not taken up they would accumulate and be used for that purpose in subsequent years. In the first year (1988), Europe, Latin America and North America easily attained this 40 per cent target, but Asia (US\$10,000 unused) and Africa (US\$63,000 unused) failed. In 1989, after exhortations to make special efforts – including an intense publicity campaign by WICAS – the 40 per cent of funds were completely used up, as well as the accumulated amounts from the previous year. In 1997, 50 per cent of all scholarships were utilized by women, while 60 per cent of development scholarships alone were utilized by women.

Findings

(1)

Solidarity and advocacy are two sides of the same coin. It is impossible to over-stress the value and importance placed by women on the solidarity of WICAS in their struggles and on its advocacy on their behalf. The weight of expectation is very great, but WICAS has borne it lightly because not only does it advocate, but it is seen to advocate. The fact that WICAS is still very much a women's desk – in the positive sense of that phrase – is a key ingredient of its relevance in these respects.

(2)

RCs have reported some confusion of roles between national church Women's Desks, women's organizations and Liaison Persons. Such role ambiguity is always stressful and unpleasant for individuals. This confusion sometimes leads to jealousies and competition, particularly competition for leadership and recognition. This lack of clearly defined roles can also result in needless duplication of effort and a consequent waste of resources. There is a need to strategize jointly in order to avoid these inefficiencies.

(3)

There is a tendency of some in authority to shut others out, or to be shut out themselves. Suspensions between different groups of church women (e.g. between older and younger women, or between the ordained and the lay) can lead to conflict. Church structures need to be reshaped to become more inclusive.

(4)

The international conference of Lutheran women in 1991 established regional networks of Lutheran women theologians and regional facilitators. Such networks have worked well and have become models for the sharing of power and responsibilities. They symbolize women's solidarity with one another.

5 Justice and human rights

It has become obvious that the most effective method of bringing about change is not by making regulations, but rather by changing attitudes and beliefs which have been built up over many years of tradition.... Trying to change the thinking within individual families is only a short-term solution. A long-term solution will have to involve whole societies.

Women editorial

The UN World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 resolved that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an 'inalienable, integral and indivisible part of the universal human rights'. This UN resolution was the outcome of a global campaign by women from every region to build awareness of widespread social discrimination against women, the routine violation of their bodies, and that economic and political deprivation comprise a violation of women's human rights. Nations and communities are responsible for these violations, which are often justified in the name of culture, tradition and religious teaching. However, culture and traditional practices are not static, but change to suit the needs of a changing society.

Through its work in advocacy and awareness building on women's human rights issues (through workshops, conferences and publications), WICAS has begun the long process of empowering women to challenge injustice and give visibility to women's actions and perspectives in the struggle for peace and justice, both within the LWF community and society generally.

WICAS's work has focused on poverty, violence, racism, illiteracy, militarism, refugees, migrants, foreign workers, prostitutes, HIV/AIDS, widows and the girl child. Specific actions have included in-house participation in the staff working team on human rights and international affairs, connecting the work of the UN and NGOs to that of the churches in relation to all aspects of human rights, justice and peace.

A good example of such a connection was WICAS's participation in the UN Women's Conference in Beijing. This was followed by the wide dissemination of information about Beijing's *Platform for Action* and the parallel NGO forum for women. Participants at the 1995 LWF International Consultation on Women later identified issues and actions needed to enable women to live full lives as equal human beings. Healthcare, education, the dignity and care of the girl child, resources for women, honouring women's contributions and knowledge, the unburdening of women from poverty, and stopping gender violence were some of the issues identified. Another important concern was to make the church a safe place for women. The outcome of this consultation is reported in *We are Witnesses*.

Other important activities of WICAS include:

- the dissemination of information; for example, on the work of the United Nations and its Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women;
- liaison with Lutheran women on the WCC Ecumenical Decade's investigation of violence in the churches;
- communicating with those women who bring to the attention of WICAS special cases of violence;
- planning and working with Regional Coordinators and national leaders on programmes in churches to combat violence and harmful traditional/cultural practices, with a special focus in East Africa on female circumcision;
- keeping alive within the LWF the discussion of violence; for example, in 1996, as a result of efforts in the DMD Programme Committee, the LWF Council adopted a resolution from the International Consultation on Women 'that the LWF secretariat initiate a study on culture and violence against women and make the findings available to member churches';
- organizing workshops: in Jerusalem for Palestinian women; in Bangkok, a workshop for Asian churches, where prostitution, trafficking of women and domestic violence were the main subjects; in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia, on cultural practices, including food taboos, female genital mutilation and other practices that violate the rights of women, and adversely affect their health.

Findings

(1)

WICAS has successfully brought women's human rights issues onto the agenda of the LWF and its member churches. But this is just the beginning. Justice for women is not yet a reality in most regions in church, community and society at large. Much work remains to be done to change entrenched patriarchal values and practices.

(2)

The infringement of the human rights of women, and violence against women, take place everywhere to varying extents and in various ways. Domestic violence – violence within families and the home – is often defended on the basis of cultural traditions which emphasize women's subordination and inferiority to men. The study of theology – any theology – can open doors long closed to women, helping them to understand the causes and sources of oppression and to change their cultures.

The LWF's Ninth Assembly follow-up of resolutions includes the 'Empowerment of women as a means of full inclusion in society'. It calls on member churches and the LWF Secretariat to

- promote economic literacy and leadership training workshops, seminars and consultations for women;
- assign a percentage of the global budget to programmes and projects which aim to empower women;
- create programmes of investment and small-scale credit accessible to women;
- assure that the programmes of the LWF and WICAS are well funded;
- reaffirm and follow-up the goals of the Ecumenical Decade, which ends in 1998;
- instil gender awareness and make sure that gender is taken seriously in all projects to be developed by ensuring that they are considered and approved by a balanced gender group;
- call on the Council to ensure that only those theological schools which provide equal access to theological education for both women and men receive funds from the LWF.

These sorts of regulatory strategy are helpful and necessary, but they can only do so much. Attitudes and beliefs, traditions and practices, cannot be changed or eliminated by regulation alone. They have to be changed by education, training, persuasion and experience. Such things can only be done by people.

(3)

WICAS's great achievement in this area has been to point to the connections between culture and society, theology and oppression. Understanding these connections is the first step toward eliminating prejudice and injustice. When individual women are enabled to understand that there is nothing inevitable or God-given about their circumstances, they can be empowered to work for change.

(4)

Women magazine has acted as a safe and responsive place in which contributors can express their understandings of their societies and churches. In doing so, it has forged and reinforced links between disparate regions and individuals.

(5)

WICAS's involvement in the provision of workshops, seminars and training is clearly of significance in its implications for the erosion of oppression and injustice against women. Any kind of education – personal effectiveness training, functional skills, organizational awareness – instils confidence and sharpens the mind and the appetite for other tasks.

4

Recommendations

Most of the recommendations listed below are to do with the vision and the identity of WICAS. The vision of WICAS is currently captured in the image of the round table, which implies the equal participation of men and women at all levels and in all aspects of church and community life, free from gender oppression and discrimination. However, that vision and that identity need to be communicated over and over again, with clarity and precision.

It has often been suggested by Regional Coordinators and other Lutheran women that WICAS and the LWF should explore ways in which churches can be held more accountable for the agreements and commitments made at LWF Assemblies (see the 1995 report from the ICW, *We Are Witnesses*). This is an issue of particular sensitivity for the Communion: if accountability is too heavy handed then it risks alienating churches altogether. On the other hand, the failure of some churches to implement the agreements they make together undermines the credibility of the Communion.

Is it at least possible to develop and implement a system of acknowledging the efforts of some churches to implement these decisions,— even if it merely involves publicity and public recognition at Assemblies? Is it possible to encourage and assist member churches to develop mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of Assembly resolutions and to identify obstacles? Would it be useful if the LWF were to put in place a means of follow-up with member churches, to support them in overcoming their particular problems?

The organizational culture of churches is beyond the scope of this report, but it's worth recording that much can be done to improve attitudes and ways of working within church structures. WICAS's involvement in this can perhaps extend to no more than setting a good example, but consideration should be given by the LWF to producing guidelines and models on best practice, as well as advisory and consultation services which serve as incentives for churches to implement change. We recommend that these options be considered seriously.

Women and theology

(1)

We recommend that WICAS's promotion of feminist theology and theological studies for women be strengthened by a commitment to providing written resources for study and debate to libraries of Lutheran seminaries, to individual professors and students who would not otherwise have access to feminist literature. Workshop materials, discussion documents and books by women should be used as resource materials in events organized by the LWF and member churches. Such a commitment should be undergirded with research into demand, distribution and financing, so that real needs are met at an acceptable cost.

(2)

We recommend that LWF-WICAS consider ways to extend its mandate to promote awareness in church leaders, the clergy, teachers in seminaries, and men and women in the churches about inclusive theology, anthropology and ecclesiology, liberation theology and feminist theology, so that the teachings and practice of the church and the Lutheran community become liberating for women and men alike, and no longer the means for subordinating and oppressing women. This would be a way of enhancing the discussion on gender and the theology of the churches begun in the Hong Kong Assembly.

(3)

WICAS should also consider ways in which it can strengthen its support and encouragement of exchanges between women theologians worldwide, with special attention to the needs of women from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This would help to break their isolation, empower them and strengthen their efforts to develop Lutheran theology and practice – promoting the concept of the round table, the ordination of women, the equality and communion of men and women in the life of the church and the service of God.

(4)

LWF-WICAS should create possibilities for women and men in ordained ministry to meet and discuss issues arising out of their ministry. It is especially necessary in churches which have just begun to ordain women that ordained women be given the opportunity to reflect on their ministry and that their reflection should be shared widely within the Communion. This will help to develop an inclusive theology of ministry where ordained women's perspectives are considered.

Gender awareness

(1)

In the light of WICAS's policy directions and LWF Assembly commitments summarized under Findings, and taking into consideration views already expressed by Regional Coordinators, we recommend the formalization and extension of WICAS's twin-track approach to women and gender. The mandate of WICAS should be amended to include a specific gender component, involving responsibility for the promotion and monitoring of gender awareness in all areas of the LWF's work and the work of member churches. 'Promotion' should include in-built procedures to ensure that WICAS is able to advise and consult all other LWF Desks, which should also be held accountable for working to specific procedures and policies concerning gender. The protection and extension of women's rights and freedoms must continue to be emphasized, but it must be backed-up with gender education and awareness.

(2)

With its new Gender component, we recommend WICAS's continued concentration on such matters as enabling, advising, coordinating, monitoring and promoting, rather than on implementing specific activities and events. The WICAS secretariat in Geneva would thus become a centre of advice, liaison and support for Regional Coordinators, Liaison Persons and member churches in implementing programmes and resolutions of the LWF Assembly. WICAS should be seen as a node in a whole network of contacts and activities, rather than as the hub of a wheel or the source of all activities. This would draw on the large pool of human resources already available (such as Regional Coordinators, Liaison Persons, women leaders) to lead in the regions, and thus free WICAS staff for other tasks.

(3)

One vital area of resourcing which should remain within WICAS's mandate is the publication and distribution of materials relating to gender education, especially with regard to project implementation and organizational structures. These should include practical guidelines and constructive approaches in the form of models for church organizations to consider, so that ignorance of what to do does not serve as an excuse for inactivity. The collection of data from expert sources should be part of this resourcing, so that such data and expert help can be accessed by churches as necessary.

Leadership development

(1)

Support structures and networks for women are an effective means of strengthening and empowering women leaders in an often indifferent or hostile church

environment. We recommend that WICAS continue to support and encourage such structures and networks for women in higher leadership within the LWF (e.g. the tradition of women's meetings held parallel to official LWF meetings such as the Assembly and the Council, should be continued and extended). The RC and Liaison Person networks should also be strengthened (see below).

(2)

Resources for women's leadership training are a necessary investment and the regions should be encouraged and funded to develop their own collection of resources adapted to suit local and regional needs. Such a method could assist in contextualizing leadership training.

(3)

We recommend that WICAS considers promoting public awareness about the feasibility and the desirability of women in church communities to elect and support women to church leadership. Through the networks, grassroots work can be undertaken to educate women and men to understand that women have leadership capacities, and that it is in the interest of women to elect appropriate women leaders within the church at all levels. This would help to lay the basis for the creation of an inclusive church, where both men and women could work as equal partners in the service of God.

(4)

Together with other units of the LWF, WICAS should develop methods of promoting and using women already trained by WICAS programmes. This would serve to multiply out-reach, provide local role models of women as leaders, and create leadership opportunities so as to further enhance the leadership capacities of these women.

Justice and human rights

(1)

The LWF Council has made many recommendations on women's human rights: emphasis should now be placed on how to implement them.

(2)

The new emphasis since the International Consultation on Women in 1995 is on making the church a safe place for women. Further work needs to be done to design programmes that address this issue. Use should be made of those churches that are already far advanced in this respect.

(3)

The valuable work of WICAS in bringing the issues of violence against women, justice, human rights and peace on to the agendas of the LWF and member

churches through programmes and projects, publications and advocacy work, should continue to be supported. Greater cooperation within the Department for Mission and Development and with other departments is needed if women's human rights are to be addressed adequately.

A Clear Plan of Action and We are Witnesses

We note that presently WICAS uses two documents – *A Clear Plan of Action* and *We are Witnesses* – for the interpretation of its programmes. While these documents contain the fine detail about issues and possible actions, and while they serve as useful resource material, there is a need to develop a very small and precise document on the same level and along the same lines as *A Clear Plan of Action*. This should incorporate the feedback from *We are Witnesses* and the LWF Ninth Assembly. In this connection:

(1)

We recommend that WICAS draft a summary list of general objectives, in consultation and agreement with representatives of its constituents. The list should be short and clearly understandable. Great care should be given to wording and formulation, so that the objectives are of the same logical order and are not self-fulfilling. This list should also appear on all major policy documents and publications, especially those circulated to churches and individuals. It should be exactly the same each time it is reproduced and checked specifically for this purpose. In combination with or as part of a statement of values and vision, this list of objectives should increase the profile of WICAS by 'branding' its identity on all documents. It should also instil into people's minds that WICAS exists, so that its relevance will be called to mind as needs arise.

(2)

We recommend that WICAS compile a statement of vision and values, agreed by representatives and developed within the framework of DMD. The purpose of the statement is to summarize formally what WICAS seeks to become and accomplish. It should describe, among other things, WICAS's basic purpose, what is unique or distinctive about it, how it is likely to evolve in the long run, what are its principles, what are its principal services, its basic beliefs, values and aspirations.

The process of writing such a statement will enable WICAS to evaluate its fundamental attributes and characteristics. The statement will establish boundaries to guide further strategy formulation, including specifying in which activities WICAS will engage, and those activities in which it will not engage. Clearly defined goals and objectives can help develop effective programmes, strategies and tactics.

This statement should appear on all major and relevant documents and publications of WICAS. An extremely short distillation of the statement could appear on many other WICAS documents, as is the practice among NGOs generally. The wording of the statement should in all cases be exactly the same (which means checking it each time it is used). The statement should remain unaltered unless explicitly agreed by means of consultation with constituents.

(3)

We recommend that the general dearth of precise indicators and assessment criteria for WICAS's activities and objectives should be rectified. A suggested simplification of the objectives in *A Clear Plan of Action* is provided in the section entitled 'Approach and methodology' of this report, together with indicators and assessment criteria. WICAS's programmes should be planned and designed so that such data is collectable for the purposes of periodic review of its work. Statistics and feedback on activities such as workshops and seminars can easily be gathered and stored centrally for this purpose.

(4)

We recommend that churches be supplied with models of guidelines on how to set their own objectives, indicators and assessment criteria. The present item under 'Member church responsibility' in *A Clear Plan of Action* (p. 34) – that churches should 'adopt monitoring and evaluation methods including appropriate performance indicators' – is inadequate as it stands. It is desirable to document the reasons why many churches were not able to develop their own plans of action between the Curitiba and Hong Kong Assemblies. Such information would be useful for the LWF if it is to respond better to the needs of churches.

(5)

The last 25 years have seen revolutionary changes in communications technology. We recommend that the work practices of WICAS be reviewed in light of these developments. Consideration should be given to disseminating the resources produced by LWF through electronic media wherever possible.

Regional Coordinators

(1)

Regional Coordinators are very important and should therefore have all the support they can get. We heard many of them describe the technical and communication problems which hamper and impede their work. Budgets for the purchase of phones, faxes, e-mail, typewriters and computers for Regional Coordinators, as appropriate, should be considered by WICAS. The aim would be for all Regional Coordinators to possess or have adequate access to a computer and fax machine and training in their use. Needs could be assessed by WICAS and arrangements made and specifically agreed for access to equipment

to be made available by churches or women's organizations, or else suitable equipment to be purchased.

(2)

We recommend that the suggestion of Regional Coordinators that planning meetings involving Regional Coordinators, church Liaison Persons, women's organizations and others be held regularly, should be seriously considered. Such meetings might ensure that strategies and agendas can be drawn up which avoid duplication of effort and which clarify roles. Such meetings could be held once a year or every two years.

(3)

We recommend that training or orientation courses be organized by WICAS for new Regional Coordinators, enabling them to gain a very clear understanding of the goals and programmes of WICAS, and the LWF as a whole. They should also be trained in budgeting, programme planning, implementation, evaluation and reporting procedures. They should be encouraged to train others in similar skills.

(4)

We also recommend that, where necessary, Regional Coordinators be provided with skills training in documenting and reporting on their activities, as well as on participatory approaches to programme planning and development, implementation and evaluation. This could include skills to set realistic objectives, and develop instruments to monitor, measure and evaluate the work.

(5)

In order for WICAS to further strengthen the position of Regional Coordinators, we recommend that WICAS explore ways of ensuring that Regional Coordinators are integrated into and remunerated within their regional structures for the work they do. This would help to empower them and strengthen their position within church structures, and at a personal level contribute towards their economic independence.

Publications and communications

(1)

The magazine *Women* has established itself as a valuable communications resource and means of information dissemination. We support WICAS's continued efforts to expand circulation and readership. We note the frequently expressed wish of Lutheran women for the magazine to appear in other-language editions and recommend that this be investigated.

(2)

WICAS should explore and utilize other media for publications and communication for different audiences and contexts. For example, posters, cards and calendars can be very effective for advertising slogans for improving the status of women.

(3)

Encouraging women to write and publish their work in LWF/church or ecumenical publications is one way that WICAS can ensure that women's voices are heard in different forums. Funding and programmes should be made available for this.

The overall picture

(1)

The significance over the last ten years of emerging and incremental strategies arising from general areas of concern, has important implications for the future work of WICAS. We recommend that WICAS continue to strengthen its links with the grassroots, particularly via its Regional Coordinators and publications such as *Women*. The authority of the Desk is based ultimately on its knowledge of the real issues and priority concerns of women around the world. WICAS's ability to promote, enable, advise and enthuse rests on the quality and quantity of its grassroots research and experience.

(2)

We recommend that WICAS deepen its solidarity with organizations within the emerging global consensus about the importance of women's and gender issues: UN, governmental and non-governmental agencies, other ecumenical organizations and world communions, etc. Only such consensus can ensure the sharing of power and resources.

(3)

The policies and plans formulated in *A Clear Plan of Action* and *We are Witnesses* provide a sound basis for future work, especially in the light of recommendations and commitments made at the 1997 LWF Assembly in Hong Kong. We recommend that priority now be given to ensuring their adequate implementation by member churches. In this way, a global structure will eventually be in place which can extend and deepen the WICAS network, so that future work should in theory have a head start in all churches.

(4)

A Clear Plan of Action and *We are Witnesses* imply and necessitate a global partnership, along the lines of points (3) and (4) above. They also imply a particular future for WICAS, one in which communications, adaptability, speed of response

and imaginative approaches to issues will be of greatest importance. We recommend that the evolution of such a WICAS – already well under way – be further encouraged by placing more emphasis on and more resources in facilitation, enablement, networking, coordinating, researching and advising. Church and ecumenical bodies as a whole are already committing themselves to these ways of working.

5

Lessons learned

There is greater scope for WICAS to communicate itself to others: the fact of its existence, its identity, its vision and its concerns. This kind of communication is important for its self-understanding, because telling others about WICAS necessitates thinking and reflecting seriously about who WICAS is and what it wishes to accomplish.

It is the central contention of this report that the basic thrust of WICAS's work – the course it has set itself – is fundamentally sound. The valuable support and confirmation that WICAS has received from the LWF as a whole – most recently in the commitments made at the 1997 Assembly – entail the further development of the two-pronged strategy of gender and women which has already begun.

Such a two-pronged strategy has implications for the organization of WICAS, how it relates to the rest of the LWF, and how it relates to other Christian world communions and ecumenical bodies. It seems necessary to increase the number of permanent full- or part-time staff at WICAS, but such a decision can only be made as the resources of the Federation allow and how they are distributed.

The all-pervasive nature of gender awareness necessitates greater involvement for WICAS in much of the work of the LWF. This would have to be systematized with care and sensitivity. Policies and procedures would have to be drawn up in full consultation and agreement with all the parties concerned. As in all other areas of work, constituent involvement in the setting and evaluation of short-term and long-term goals is of great importance for the success of WICAS.

The overall picture

WICAS exists for the purpose of encouraging the participation of women in the total life of the Federation and the member churches. Advocacy is the overriding task of this office. Advocacy is an attempt to influence change in ideas, attitudes, approach, policy or programme for the benefit of the target group. It presupposes a deep knowledge of the people and the issues that

call for that advocacy. Successful advocacy takes on some amount of activism and resists the status quo. The advocate uses techniques such as persuasion, empirical data, diplomacy and, not least, the law, policy or other binding agreements. For advocacy to be most effective it must start with facts. The justification for WICAS's advocacy is the reality of women's lives as women tell it and as it is shown in various researches. WICAS is a people-centred desk which grounds its work in affirming belief in the witness of Jesus the Christ.

WICAS 1995 Annual Report

What sense can be made of all that we've said so far? Does it help us see what WICAS is like as a whole? What is the overall picture?

Seen as a whole, WICAS is a Desk of considerable complexity. For a start, it has lots of constituents. A constituent is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's objectives – those who have or could have a stake or interest in the organization's activities. WICAS's constituents are interrelated in complex ways, not all of them mutually compatible. They include:

- *constituents* on whose behalf WICAS exists and operates;
- *staff* who conduct WICAS's affairs;
- *individuals* and *churches* who receive the goods and services that WICAS provides;
- *suppliers* who provide the resources for WICAS's activities;
- *the decision-making bodies* that guarantee WICAS's rights and privileges, enforces its responsibilities, and regulates its behaviour;
- and – of course – the wider *societal, cultural and natural environment*.

Constituents can change over time, as their interests, concerns and interrelationships change. An LWF Desk with an international orientation like WICAS has a different set of constituents in every country in which there are LWF member churches.

This complex web of constituents has huge implications for any analysis of the power relations and expectations of WICAS constituents, and how they all communicate with one another. LWF member churches, for example, may or may not communicate effectively with WICAS, or have a Women's Desk of their own, or finance their Women's Desk adequately, or possess an institutional culture susceptible to positive change. The precise circumstances of member churches in these respects determine their role as constituents. As part of the decision-making body of the LWF, they prescribe and approve the direction of WICAS's work. However, it is the commitment and the quantity and quality of resources they allocate for such work within their own structures which determine their usefulness or otherwise.

As we have seen already in relation to women's participation in LWF Assemblies, goal setting is an extremely valuable tool for the LWF and for WICAS. People work more efficiently and effectively if they have challenging goals with clearly defined time deadlines. If goals are agreed and specified explicitly, they can go some way towards achieving congruence between different constituents and constituent roles.

Participation in goal setting is one effective method for enhancing goal commitment – meaning the extent to which a goal is adhered to and the extent to which changing the goal is resisted. Specific goals invariably lead to higher performance levels than do more general goals, but much depends on the perceptions and evaluations that people make of themselves and their goals.

Goals only affect performance if they lead to the development of effective plans and strategies. The varying commitments and expectations of WICAS constituents can make for widely divergent evaluations of goals and their usefulness. The most obvious divergencies exist between women and their churches.

Huge differences in commitment to goals, plus widely differing expectations and perceptions of goals, within a complex web of constituents, not only make the work of WICAS very complicated, but also make WICAS itself a difficult unit to delineate. Its organizational structure is like a nexus with permeable boundaries. Change is affected by the interaction of subcultures: Office and church subcultures, male and female subcultures, congregational subcultures, institutional and informal subcultures.

None of this necessarily implies problems and – anyway – problems can be turned into opportunities. The structural ambiguity of WICAS can be a strength, as so often in the past, as long as it is not allowed to turn into confusion and stress. But thought must be given to the WICAS of the future. Is the considerable progress made so far jeopardized or protected by the present way of working? Given the complexities of WICAS's constituent relationships, should WICAS actually initiate programmes, or should it adopt a more advisory role? Is WICAS attempting to serve too broad a constituency with too few resources? How can WICAS work more effectively within the LWF and with other ecumenical organizations? How do the answers to these sorts of questions affect Regional Coordinators and Liaison Persons?

Over the past ten years WICAS has recognized this complexity. Frequently, it initiates a process of channelling and directing organizational activities – in consultation with its core constituents – around a general area of concern so as to move incrementally. WICAS's primary role of advocacy sits well with this approach, in that it begins with facts as they are reported at the grassroots.

Ambiguity – in roles and responsibilities – can be creative and empowering, but it can also be confusing and debilitating, sapping organizational will and lowering

expectations. It is to WICAS's great credit that it has largely avoided this difficulty. However, the ambiguity of some of its goals (and of the goals it has provided for member churches) is a problem. WICAS has not so much solved this problem as ridden over it through sheer strength and determination.

The present work of WICAS is hindered by discrepancies between commitment and resources: individuals may have commitment but few resources; churches may have resources but little commitment. WICAS tries to combat and remove these discrepancies as much as it can within the means at its disposal.

Financial resources available for work on gender equality need to increase rather than decrease over the next few years. This would in itself indicate progress in support of the higher profile accorded the issue around the world. It also has implications for the future structure and work of WICAS.

One of WICAS's great strengths over the last ten years has been its ability to make connections and build bridges: between issues and events, between different groups of people, between secular organizations and the church, between present circumstances and future hopes.

WICAS was quick to recognize the tremendous potential of Beijing's *Platform for Action* as setting the global agenda for gaining the equality of men and women. Its constructive approach to Beijing is both enthusing and exhilarating because it makes plain and tangible to women that local concerns and debates are paralleled in global forums. It also makes plain and tangible the LWF's own commitment to the Beijing agenda and its desire for everyone to be involved in its implementation. The timeliness with which *We are Witnesses* emerged as a church-based platform for action is commendable. Its translation of the issues into a language and a programme which churches and congregations can understand and apply is an important step forward in transforming LWF member churches as Christian communities of partnership and inclusiveness.

The success of WICAS in promoting the 'mainstreaming' of gender issues into other departments of the LWF is exemplified in the adoption by the LWF Council in September 1996 of a recommendation that the

LWF secretariat ensure that the staff of the Department of Theology and Studies include a theologian with a background in Feminist Theology in order to help develop women's perspectives in studies and discussions in the LWF and in member churches.

Such mainstreaming was also a large part of the relevant follow-up resolutions of the LWF's Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong in 1997.

Appendixes

Appendix I: Terms of reference for the evaluation

1 General objectives

The main objective of the Office for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) is to advocate for women's participation in the total life of church and society. (For WICAS's goals and objectives, see the LWF publication *A Clear Plan of Action* (1992).

2 Purpose of WICAS evaluation

WICAS staff requested an evaluation to be done in 1998 with the purpose of assessing the work of the desk for the ten years from 1988 to 1998, to coincide with the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women as well as the end of the Curitiba Assembly mandate and the beginning of the Hong Kong mandate (1990–7). At this juncture, it is deemed opportune, however, to carry out the evaluation earlier than scheduled because of the unexpected early departure of the WICAS Secretary. The consideration that an earlier evaluation will allow for an input from her is deemed relevant and necessary.

WICAS requested an evaluation with the view of benefiting from the findings, insights, lessons learned and recommendations from evaluation as the work for the next millennium is being planned. Simultaneously, the LWF can also gain full and timely understanding of the programme performance before embarking in new directions as suggested by the recommendations from the International Consultation on Women (1995) and the Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong (1997). The overall objective of the evaluation is to review the progress made to date towards achieving WICAS's objectives and to assess the actual performance of the implementation of the programmes between 1988 and 1998. The evaluation will cover all main programme activities. Six programme priorities identified in the publication *A Clear Plan of Action* will form the basis of the evaluation.

More specifically, the evaluation will:

- assess the effectiveness and the efficiency of the WICAS programmes;

- assess the relevance of the programme strategy and objectives *vis-à-vis* the needs of the target groups;
- assess the extent of achievement of the set objectives of particular programmes;
- assess the results and effects of the WICAS networks of Regional Coordinators, Liaison Persons, theological networks and national leaders;
- assess the exchange programme as well as continuing education programmes and activities;
- record in broad outline the positive achievements of the programmes;
- recommend strategies and specific measures for improvement and strengthening of the programmes where necessary;
- draw lessons learned for programme consolidation and future programme implementation;
- suggest new areas that seem to call for attention.

3 Main areas of research for the evaluation

Within the set objectives of the evaluation, the following sources will be important for the evaluators:

- Travel reports and reports of seminars
- Letters in the files
- Minutes of the Council
- Staff minutes of DMD
- Women magazine and all other publications of WICAS
- The work of Regional Coordinators
- Special Fund activities
- Use of all other funding in the budget lines of WICAS
- Lectures, Bible studies and other presentations given by staff of WICAS
- Photographs and letters from different contacts of WICAS
- WICAS's association with other ecumenical units, NGOs and the UN

4 Methodology of the evaluation

The evaluation team will meet with the following groups and individuals:

- Regional Coordinators, 17–20 November
- DMD staff
- WICAS staff

The following may be interviewed or their reports read:

- Present and past Regional Coordinators
- Participants in WICAS-organized events
- WCC Unit on Women's Concerns
- WCC Theological Education and Bossey
- WICAS resource people

- Representatives from the Women's Desk of the Regional Councils of Churches
- Representatives from Geneva-based international women's NGOs

Given the diversity of groups and individuals to consult during the evaluation, the team will not be in a position to meet all the people in person, but will also use all other forms of modern communication (e.g. telephone, e-mail correspondence and written questionnaires).

The evaluation will commence with a full briefing at the WICAS office in Geneva. It is proposed that the team spends two days for the briefing and development of the instrument for evaluation.

At the end of the fieldwork, the team will convene a debriefing session at the LWF offices in Geneva to share their tentative findings, recommendations and lessons learned. The debriefing session will bring together DMD staff, and representatives from other departments and units as need be.

5 Composition of the evaluation team

The evaluation will be an external evaluation. The evaluation team will consist of three external consultants with considerable international experience. The consultants should have working experience with women's international work, be gender literate and familiar with church structures.

6 Planning

The evaluation will begin on 13 November 1997 in Geneva. The team will meet in Geneva on 13–21 November for briefing, development of the evaluation instrument, data gathering, and detailed planning of the whole evaluation process and methods. The team will then decide on appropriate working methods and present this to the designated representatives of the LWF. During this visit, the team will interact with the Regional Coordinators of WICAS and gather the needed data for their research. The whole evaluation, including report writing, will be undertaken and completed between 13 November and 31 January. Details of each of the stages will be worked out between Musimbi Kanyoro and the evaluation team and agreed plans will be communicated to the Director of the Department for Mission and Development.

7 Reporting and debriefing requirements

The report of the evaluation should be in English. It should be produced in an attractive format ready for publication. The main text (without annexes) should have a minimum of 50 pages. The final draft version will be made available latest two weeks before the deadline date of 31 January, in order to enable the parties concerned to give feedback. The final version should be made available to the LWF Department for Mission and Development in three copies and in Word

Perfect 6.1 for Windows on diskette. The report should make use of graphs, pie charts, pictures and other visual aids that make print media more interesting to readers.

The following structure of the evaluation report is suggested but can be modified:

- 0 Executive summary
- 1 Description of the programme and the executing organization
- 2 Approach and methodology of the evaluation
- 3 Main findings
- 4 Conclusions and recommendations
- 5 Lessons learned
- 6 Annexes

Agreement between the evaluation team and the Lutheran World Federation

PROJECT: Evaluation of the work of WICAS 1987-97

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, spelt out above, we the undersigned accept to undertake the responsibility of evaluating the Office for Women in Church and Society for the Department for Mission and Development of the Lutheran World Federation.

The Evaluation will take place between 13 November 1997 and 31 January 1998. This contract is effective as of today, 13 November 1997.

The Evaluation Team:
Valsa Verghese Chacko
Brigitte Lee
Jack Messenger

For the LWF:
Musimbi Kanyoro, Secretary, WICAS
Péri Rasolondraibe, Director, DMD

Appendix 2: Terms of reference for the Department for Mission and Development

The Department for Mission and Development is based on the calling of churches to participate in God's mission by proclaiming in word and deed both the presence and the coming of the kingdom, by conveying the message of salvation in Jesus Christ to the world, and by exemplifying in concrete acts a responsible care for all aspects of the life of the human community.

The specific assignment of this department, in fostering the communion of member churches and in the spirit of listening to the people, is to encour-

age, support and work jointly with Lutheran churches, agencies and other groups as they endeavour to create, develop and maintain ministries faithful to the fundamental task of the church to participate in God's mission to all creation.

In pursuance of its assignment and within the limits of its resources, the department seeks to

- 1 carry out programmes with LWF member churches in respect to their task of mission and evangelism within the many contexts in which the churches are present;
- 2 assist LWF member churches in responding to the needs for community development shared by all human beings, with special concern for joint action in solving problems related to the family, society and nation;
- 3 serve the LWF member churches in the field of communication as it relates to the church's mandate to proclaim the gospel, foster human development and exchange information;
- 4 advocate inclusive patterns of full participation by women and men, youth, the elderly and persons with disabling conditions in the lives of church and society;
- 5 assist the LWF member churches in developing programmes of Christian education/theological education, which are fully responsive to the needs of church, society and nation;
- 6 carry out a programme of leadership training, scholarships and exchange between LWF member churches;
- 7 initiate and conduct consultative services as requested by the LWF member churches, the Council or other LWF units.

In pursuance of its assignment and within the limits of its resources, this department is authorized to

- 1 stimulate a comprehensive programme of mutual sharing between LWF member churches;
- 2 respond to requests for specific projects for which the services of the LWF or another international organization are required;
- 3 provide for meetings on a global, regional or sub-regional basis;
- 4 encourage new forms of Christian witness; and
- 5 offer such other special services as may be appropriate.

The work of the department will be carried out through a system of area desks responsive to the needs of LWF regional expressions and through desks which address particular concerns of church life in all regions. It will be the department which will implement the decisions of the LWF Project Committee. Its work will also express ecumenical concerns for the unity of the church and its mission.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for Regional Coordinators

1 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION, TRAINING AND FORMATION

- To equip women for full partnership in the life and mission of the family, church and society and to help them organize effectively.
- To facilitate the education of women in the social, cultural, economic, environmental and political realities of the world.

(a) Please list the education/leadership priorities in your region:

<u>In 1988, or when you became RC</u>	<u>Today</u>
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

(b) What concrete actions have been taken in your region?

<u>In 1988, or when you became RC</u>	<u>Today</u>
Workshops	Workshops
Conferences	Conferences
Leadership training	Leadership training
Church visits	Church visits
Networking	Networking
Other	Other

(c) What have been the achievements in your region? What have been the obstacles?

2 JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR WOMEN

- To achieve justice and defend the human rights of women.

(a) Please list the justice and human rights priorities for women in your region.

<u>In 1988, or when you became RC</u>	<u>Today</u>
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

(b) What concrete actions have been taken in your region?

<u>In 1988, or when you became RC</u>	<u>Today</u>
Workshops	Workshops
Conferences	Conferences
Leadership training	Leadership training
Church visits	Church visits
Networking	Networking
Other	Other

(c) What have been the achievements in your region? What have been the obstacles?

3 WOMEN AND THEOLOGY

Women in theology:

- To incorporate women's perspectives in theology in the thinking and teaching of LWF member churches.
- To ensure equal access for women to theological education and ordination.

(a) Please list the priorities in your region:

<u>In 1988, or when you became RC</u>	<u>Today</u>
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

(b) What concrete actions have been taken in your region?

In 1988, or when you became RC

Today

Workshops

Workshops

Conferences

Conferences

Leadership training

Leadership training

Church visits

Church visits

Networking

Networking

Other

Other

(c) What have been the achievements in your region? What have been the obstacles?

(d) In what way is your work linked to theologically trained women in your region?

(e) Do you use the work of feminist theologians in your activities?

General questions

(1) What, in your opinion, have been the most important contribution of WICAS in your region?

(2) In your experience, what are the main strengths of WICAS activities? What are the weaknesses?

(3) How do you perceive your role as Regional Coordinator?

(4) Any other comments?

Appendix 4: Does the LWF need a Gender Desk or a Women's Desk? A discussion paper for the LWF

Musimbi Kanyoro

Sitting at the table as equals

We propose:

- LWF secretariat, member churches and their women's organizations initiate gender analysis to expose the power relationships which prevent full participation of women in the LWF and in church structures.

LWF secretariat and member churches

- initiate through workshops and seminars gender education for changing behavioural patterns and enhancing confidence-building of women;
- critical evaluation from a gender perspective of their form of work and style of leadership; and
- a gender-balance employment policy.
- LWF secretariat ensure that the staff of the Department for Theology and Studies include a theologian with a background in Feminist Theology in order to help develop women's perspectives in studies and discussions in the LWF and in member churches.
- Member churches of the LWF, on the basis of their membership in a confessional communion accountable to all other members, examine the cultural norms and customs and biblical interpretations used which diminish or exclude participation of women.

Gender issues in church and society

It is certain that 'gender relationships in the church' is one of the burning issues that will cross with us into the 21st century. One of the ten issues discussed by the LWF Ninth Assembly was 'Gender and the theology of churches'. This was also a core issue in all the regional pre-Assembly gatherings. The message and resolutions from the Assembly define new directions for the work of the LWF into the next millennium. The Assembly had a very

strong gender emphasis which will require the LWF and its member churches to articulate and implement gender programmes and projects now, more than ever before. This paper is written as a contribution to the discussions that could help give shape to the new directions of the work currently done under the umbrella of the Desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS).

'Gender' refers to widely shared ideas and expectations (norms) about women and men: ideas about 'typically' feminine and masculine characteristics, abilities and expectations about what women and men should do and/or how to behave in various situations. These ideas and expectations are learned from families, friends, opinion-forming leaders, religious and cultural institutions, schools, the home, the workplace and the media. They reflect and influence the different roles, social status, economic and political power of women and men in society.

One of the greatest benefits of women's scholarship has been to hear the stories of women and to become aware that the subordination of women as a gender is a worldwide phenomenon defying the confines of race, class, creed, ability or nationality. This reality was voiced loud and clear at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in 1995. The conference stated that there is no single state in the world where women are safe from violence or where they are treated as equals with men. Thus, despite women's diverse social, economic and political backgrounds, by virtue of belonging to the female gender, women constitute an oppressed social group. The social construction of roles and status relegate women to an inferior position. This gender subordination is articulated through various institutions, both public and private.

Today, women call for change in the cultural values of domination and subordination which lead, among other things, to violence in the form of rape, torture, war, exploitation, ecological destruction, and the misappropriation of leadership through exclusion. These overt actions of violence are rooted in economic, political and religious structures, as well as the socio-cultural system of patriarchy. 'Patriarchy, closely associated with hierarchy, is a way of ordering reality whereby one group – in this case the male sex – is understood to be superior to the other, the female sex' (Laffey 1994.2). In the culture of patriarchy, one group assumes superiority over the others; men over women, advantaged women over disadvantaged women, the rich over the poor, whites over other races, able-bodied over disabled, heterosexuals over homosexuals, etc. Men and women alike possess this culture of dominance.

How the church can be different

The Christian faith advocates for human value and dignity. Men and women are created in the image of God. An irreversible process, which alters exist-

ing differences in relationships in the Christian community, is baptism. 'As many of you as were baptised into Christ, have clothed yourselves with Christ' (Galatians 3. 27) This is what defines Christians from other people. But even in the church, the realization of this oneness is not a reality. Both men and women continue to support gender injustice. This calls for a process of continued dialogue between men and women in the church.

The presence of women in theological studies in the last three decades has brought gender discussion into the churches. Women have shown how, historically, they have experienced suffering within structures because of their gender. Through theological reflection women have analysed the crisis of women in the church and their search for wholeness and the transformation of both church and society. Data drawn both from the life stories of women and from the Bible have provided the basis for such reflection. The story methodology has often been used and it has enabled women to remove theology from academic institutions, libraries and archives and into people's lives. Today, women in the church hold their faith communities accountable for the roles and status of women within them. The 'living letters' visits to the member churches of the World Council of Churches sadly confirm that churches do not see women's concerns as connected to the faith and practice of the church. Very often matters pertaining to women's concerns are marginalized or belittled as simply social, political or domestic, and thus outside the realm of serious theological discussion.

Women's Desks in the Lutheran churches and in the LWF

Presently, many Lutheran churches have Women's Desks and women's organizations. These exist for a variety of reasons. Some are primarily concerned with building up the spiritual strength of women, while others exist to support the mission of the church or to make women visible in structures which often make them invisible. Women's Desks are often situated within the church, while women's organizations parallel church activities.

Historical, conceptual and operational framework of WICAS

The Women's Desk of the LWF (WICAS) was established in the 1970s in order to respond to the needs of women in different parts of the world and make it possible for women in the Lutheran churches to communicate with each other, create networks, and share ideas, experiences and other relevant information. Most important for WICAS's goal was the need to conscientize women, society and the church to the status and dignity of women. As such, WICAS was on the front line of a massive attempt by wider societal forces to look at the role of women in society. The work of WICAS for the last 25 years (1972–97) has been largely influenced by the development paradigm of the 1960 and 1970s, commonly known as the concept of 'Women in Development' (WID). The objective of this approach was to make women visible in structures, in development, in management, in decision-making and so on. The approach concentrated on advocacy for justice for women.

Today, globally, women seek to widen that focus by examining the broader area of women's and men's roles in church and society. The focus is now more on empowerment than simply gap filling, though that continues to be a necessary part of the work.

The limitation of the 'women in church and society' approach has been that it simply adds a women's component which can be isolated and not fully integrated into the structure of the church. It has also focused on women and not on the totality of the church and the role that both men and women play in the church. Hence, while it works to bridge the gap of lack of resources, to address the poverty of women and decrease women's isolation, it does not eliminate gender blindness and male dominance in important structures of the church. It is simply assumed that because women are now participating more than ever before that they have achieved equality. But this is not the reality.

Women have not been emancipated and the problem of women's subordination and inequality to men in church and society is still an entrenched feature of cultures, structures, policies and programmes. There has been no significant redistribution of power and resources. Empowerment has not been fully achieved. Nor have equality and equity been attained.

One reason for this failure is that the institutional approach to women in the church, as in the wider social and developmental process, has been to focus on women only, which has translated into a focus on women as 'untapped resources' who have been left out. The new paradigm shift and a stronger institutional and operational approach is to develop a broader and more inclusive focus on gender in church and society. Such an approach would look at the social relationship between men and women in society and the church, and their relative contribution to the work of the church. This new push towards gender in, or gender integrated in, church and society examines the difference between women's and men's roles, responsibilities, opportunities and expectations in church and society. It seeks the active participation of women on an equal footing in day-to-day work as well as in the decision-making processes of church and society. It seeks to ensure that women have the same opportunity as men to define priorities, to take part in the design, implementation and evaluation of church programmes and procedures. It seeks to push integration of women in all phases of the church as a central part of all day-to-day operations of all Desks, departments, programmes and projects. This would change the discomfort that currently exists when women have to be seen as representatives of the churches in structures which until now have had only men. To face the times in which we live, men and women must discuss shared relationships.

This vision is consistent with the vision, policies and work programmes of civil and secular society. The LWF Assembly recommended that the LWF

should join the rest of the world in implementing the concerns expressed in the *Platform for Action* from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in 1995. WICAS therefore must by necessity adapt its programmes in such a way that they reflect the post-Beijing era in content and methodology. In development jargon, the theory of 'Women in development' has given way to a 'Gender and development (GAD) approach. A gender approach is now evident and in use by secular institutions in civil society, the World Bank, UN agencies, academic institutions, NGOs and governments.

Since 1995, the staff of WICAS have tried to be sensitive to these changes, but the definition of the mandate meant that radical changes could only be possible after the LWF Assembly in Hong Kong in 1997.

The new challenges facing WICAS require that the Desk recognize in its operations the differences between men and women in terms of their roles, expectations and responsibilities, which would bring about the changes that women of the 1990s demand from society. The Lutheran World Federation is a common space where all Lutheran churches strive to find communion together. It is therefore necessary that the LWF has the capacity to be proactive on many issues of justice, among them gender issues.

Since 1990, WICAS has operated under the general mandate of the Department for Mission and Development and relates specifically to the commitment to an inclusive communion. In order to carry out its task of promoting that inclusive communion, WICAS has to relate both to men and women in church and society in order to advocate for the needed changes that will establish such a communion.

Gender, the missing link

When WICAS was established in 1972, the emphasis of its work was on the conscientization of women to stand up for their rights. Today, in every region and country where there is an LWF member church, there are conscientized women deeply immersed in doing their own advocacy, and they are doing it well. Over the years WICAS has enabled women to meet and share stories of their own experiences, as well as examine obstacles and strategies for action. These gatherings have empowered women to speak for themselves and also enabled Lutheran women to build international and ecumenical solidarity with other women. Lutheran women today do not work in isolation, either as churches or individuals. In addition to these gatherings of women, other LWF initiatives, such as exchange programmes, visitation programmes, development support and scholarships for further education, have all helped to form a new image of women in Lutheran churches.

The well-organized activities of women in member churches challenge the current operation of WICAS. Now, after 25 years of the current set up, there is a need to shift energy to another area. The moving of the Desk to DMD in 1990 also created new definitions for WICAS which need to be seen in practice. At the moment, more attention is needed for monitoring and asking for accountability in agreements that the communion of Lutheran churches makes together. Assemblies, Council meetings, regional meetings and national church governing bodies are the places where joint commitments are made. This means that there is a need to confront the men in Lutheran churches with the gender agenda. This requires shifting emphasis from women to gender.

This shifting of emphasis is a celebration of progress after 25 years of hard work. The shift would align the mandate of WICAS with the general objectives of DMD. It would be a visible acknowledgement of the progress made so far. It stretches and challenges our imagination to develop new methods of work and it keeps the tension of our memory between the past, the present and the future. We look back to learn from history and to affirm those who have paved the way and the progress made so far. We look to the present because the issues we are addressing are not solved once and for all. Traditions take a long time to change. There are repeated instances of backlashes against women, even though we have made much progress. Yet we look to the future because we are a people of faith and hope.

Moving beyond the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women

That it is time for the LWF to formally recognize and integrate gender into the design, planning and content of all of its work seems obvious. A basic starting point is comprehensive gender-based analysis of church theology, structures and praxis. This would be followed by a process of institutionalizing gender-sensitive management education which would appreciate and begin to initiate programmes that differentiate between the practical and strategic needs of women and men. In the case of women, the former includes those issues already being dealt with under the current formulation of the WICAS programme: workload, health and income. Meeting the strategic needs of women would focus on ensuring the equal status of women and men in terms of adjustments in their roles, responsibilities and participation in decision-making within the church. These include the recruitment and promotion of women into managerial positions, higher educational opportunities, access to high-level committees and financial control.

The promotion of women's participation in the life of the churches is one overriding commitment to which Lutheran churches have often agreed. There are two sides to making women's participation meaningful. One is through an increase in numbers, and the other, more difficult, one is to let

women's thinking and women's presence have their impact on the nature of the church and life within the churches, so as to make church and society a safe place for women. While numerical increases are to be acknowledged, the other aspects of participation are still far from being realized and they need urgent attention.

The Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women proved that men do not yet know how to be in solidarity with women. A gender approach will seek to teach and learn together with men the meaning of solidarity.

What are some of the immediate constraints for a Gender Desk in the LWF?

A shift to a gender desk will require that the staff employed in Geneva be gender conscious. The present job description and search for staff will be more involving than they have been for the last 25 years. This may disqualify some people who currently qualify because of their experience in women's issues. There may also be fears from women as to whether a gender approach opens up competition to male applicants for positions in the Desk currently called WICAS, which has always been staffed by women.

Could a staff person in an LWF Gender Desk be male and thus rob women of a chance?

Objectively, a gender-sensitive male is a better advocate of gender justice for women than a gender-insensitive woman. However, such men are difficult to find and even if one could be found it would not be wise to recruit him now. Presently there are only a few men who are courageous enough to advocate for gender justice, so the chances for a male staff member are still remote, although in the distant future that may be an option. It can only be an option, however, after the whole of the LWF has shown a balance on gender. For the moment the Gender Desk should still be staffed by a woman, if only to boost the LWF's staff statistics for women. If the Desk expanded to two programme staff, the possibility of a woman and a man sharing the tasks should not be ruled out. It would in fact reflect the partnership that gender justice seeks to achieve, where men and women work together in harmony.

Would a Gender Desk depoliticize women's visibility and injustices done to women?

The whole idea of gender analysis and awareness is to find out where injustices exist and attempt to correct them. Today, gender injustices still illustrate that women are the ones for whom the LWF has to opt. In spite of many positive international conventions, women and girls are still categorically a disadvantaged group in the majority of our countries and churches. While the important roles that women play in society are widely recognized,

conceptual awareness of gender equity has not necessarily translated itself into different behaviour. Women form 80 per cent of the world's refugees and migrants as they seek to escape from wars, injustices and economic distress. Women confront violence in their lives in all its forms: war, domestic violence, cultural violence, sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation.

Persistent inequalities for women manifest themselves in feminized poverty, inequality in public services, educational and literacy gaps, high levels of maternal mortality and so on. The poverty of women is not just a matter of lack of material goods. Rather, it is the denial of access to resources, opportunities and participation, and inequality in the power relationships between men and women. Reversing this situation requires changing the current state of affairs and this is the basis of all gender discussion. What this indicates is the need for church and society to engage in extensive dialogue with women's analyses of social theory. Such dialogue is necessary in order to discover and utilize the new insights emerging from the experiences that women bring to shape a social theory upon which the church's ethics are built.

Is gender too radical a concept? Will it frighten both men and women?

Yes, in some ways gender is radical, in that it looks for root causes and does not simply provide sticking plasters. Gender education which acknowledges the constitutive element of social relationships, while at the same time points out the relationships of power in society, is important. Gender analysis requires a double-axis approach: a historical perspective to explain the origin of gender injustice and a deconstruction of terms to dismantle the system and put in its place more just arrangements. This is what makes a gender approach radical.

Working with gender implies a willingness to question traditions and cultures and to take nothing for granted. Gender analysis thrives on the hermeneutics of suspicion. Reports of historical documents need to be examined with pertinent questions that always ask where are the women and where are the men and why? Early investigations into gender issues were motivated by social change, and they concentrated on identifying the historical exclusion of women from many areas of achievement and implicit gender stereotypes upon which such distinctions rested. Contemporary theories of gender are concerned about the conceptual processes which generate, support, nurture and maintain engendered characteristics. Investigators look for clues in human culture, language, social structures, symbolic representation and folk traditions. But doesn't the gospel require radical change from all of us?

What are the implications of gender analysis for the Communion?

What, then, are the implications of gender discussion for the LWF Communion? A gender approach to the Communion can help men and women redefine their relationship in a mutually beneficial way. As women move into traditionally male domains such as ordained ministries and leadership in the church, men can be challenged also to move into traditionally feminine roles such as the care and nurture of children, the sick and the dying. As the dynamic of male–female relationships changes, communities will be able to benefit from the potential of all their members, thus affirming the kind of communion that is from within. Respect for all of humanity is the essence of the human quest for justice.

What are the possible steps if a shift had to be made from WICAS to GICAS?

1 Widen the remit of WICAS to GICAS.

2 Increase the mandate of the staff of GICAS so that they can relate to the whole of the LWF. A Gender Desk in the LWF would have a wider mandate than a Women's Desk. It would need to look at the projects funded by the LWF, its staffing and the total operations of the Federation. A Gender Desk would influence gender issues in the churches. A Gender Desk would influence the theology of the Lutheran churches.

3 Fund and support an internal gender training programme for staff and members of the LWF decision-making committees under the aegis of GICAS, and allow for the capacity of the gender training programmes to increase and service the wider LWF network outside the institution in Geneva – for example, to the field staff of the World Service Department and consultancy to member churches.

4 Have a gender focal point in GICAS in the form of a staff working group that reports directly to the cabinet so that each head of the department with her/his staff can monitor and evaluate the implementation of the programme within headquarters.

5 GICAS should have the clout and capacity to commission gender analysis of the church in different regions.

6 Gender analysis of church policies and structures. If we look at the activity profile of men and women, how inter-changeable are they? What are the predominantly female versus male tasks? How does women's workload compare with that of men? What are the issues of access and control within the church? How is access and control determined? Who has it? How is it maintained?

7 Gender training programmes and planning at all levels of the church. These should be planned systematically, beginning with the leadership of both men and women.

8 Gender-sensitive management:

- Rethinking the definitions and attributes of leadership.
- Rethinking the skill components of jobs and committee structures.
- Rethinking the decision-making structures/process: who takes part in what? Why and how? In what ways do existing practices exclude women?

Is GICAS an appropriate name for a Desk?

In my discussion (17–22 November, 1997) with WICAS Regional Coordinators about the content of this paper, I noted different reactions. Some of them are quite satisfied with the present programmes, style and name of WICAS, which they see as non-threatening, affirming of women and not opening the door for men to take over. There was a fear that young men currently becoming part of this gender discussion might begin to claim a place in WICAS. Along the same lines, another opinion argued that the change as proposed might be seen to be radical and feminist, which would cause a backlash against women's achievements so far. According to this line of reasoning, any change at all is unnecessary, destructive and even dangerously reactionary, and might trigger anti-feminist feeling.

Alternative arguments voiced by the majority of RCs stated that most – if not all – the suggestions for a shift to gender are good and should be implemented, but the name of WICAS must not be touched. This group is excited about change, but is afraid that it shakes things up and brings about uncertainty. They therefore suggested incorporating gender change, but keeping the name of WICAS.

This last school of thought was excited and happy for change and would have supported it if I had stayed with the LWF to implement it. However, it was feared that my departure would hamper the success of such a gender shift if the new WICAS Secretary did not have the full picture of my vision or experience.

Due respect should be given to all the above genuine opinions. Nevertheless, I think reflection about new challenges to make WICAS more effective in the total life of the church should continue to be explored in DMD and in the Federation as a whole. The Lutheran church is founded on reformation and we should be open to the spirit of reformation in our individual and institutional lives. Having served WICAS for ten years I am convinced that there is an urgent need for a rebirth, and it is in that light that I contribute to the discussion. I feel strongly that continued reflection will not harm the

integrity of the Desk or of the LWF. Even the name of the Desk should be discussed. If any of the above is found to be useful, a new name for the Desk would be helpful to mark the transition. The easiest shift could be GICAS, but let me also suggest another possible alternative:

Gender Orientation and Liaison Desk (GOLD).

Appendix 5: WICAS publications, 1990–1997

- Talitha, Qumi!* Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians, 1989; ed. by Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro, Ibadan, Daystar Press, Nigeria, 1990.
- Asian Women's Theological Experiences.* Proceedings of the Asian Lutheran Women Theologians' Meeting, Malacca, Malaysia, 23–29 September, 1990; ed. by Musimbi Kanyoro, WICAS, Geneva, 1990.
- Consulta Latino-Americana de Teólogas Luteranas*, São Paulo, 11–14 October 1990. (Abbreviated proceedings in English ed. by Musimbi Kanyoro, WICAS, Geneva, 1990.)
- European Women's Experiences in the Church.* Proceedings of the European Women Theologians' Conference, Loccum, 19–23 November 1990, compiled by Musimbi Kanyoro, WICAS, Geneva, 1990 (out of print).
- Our Advent.* Proceedings of the African Lutheran Women Theologians' Meeting, Addis Ababa, 2–6 December 1990, ed. by Musimbi Kanyoro, WICAS, Geneva, 1990 (out of print).
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